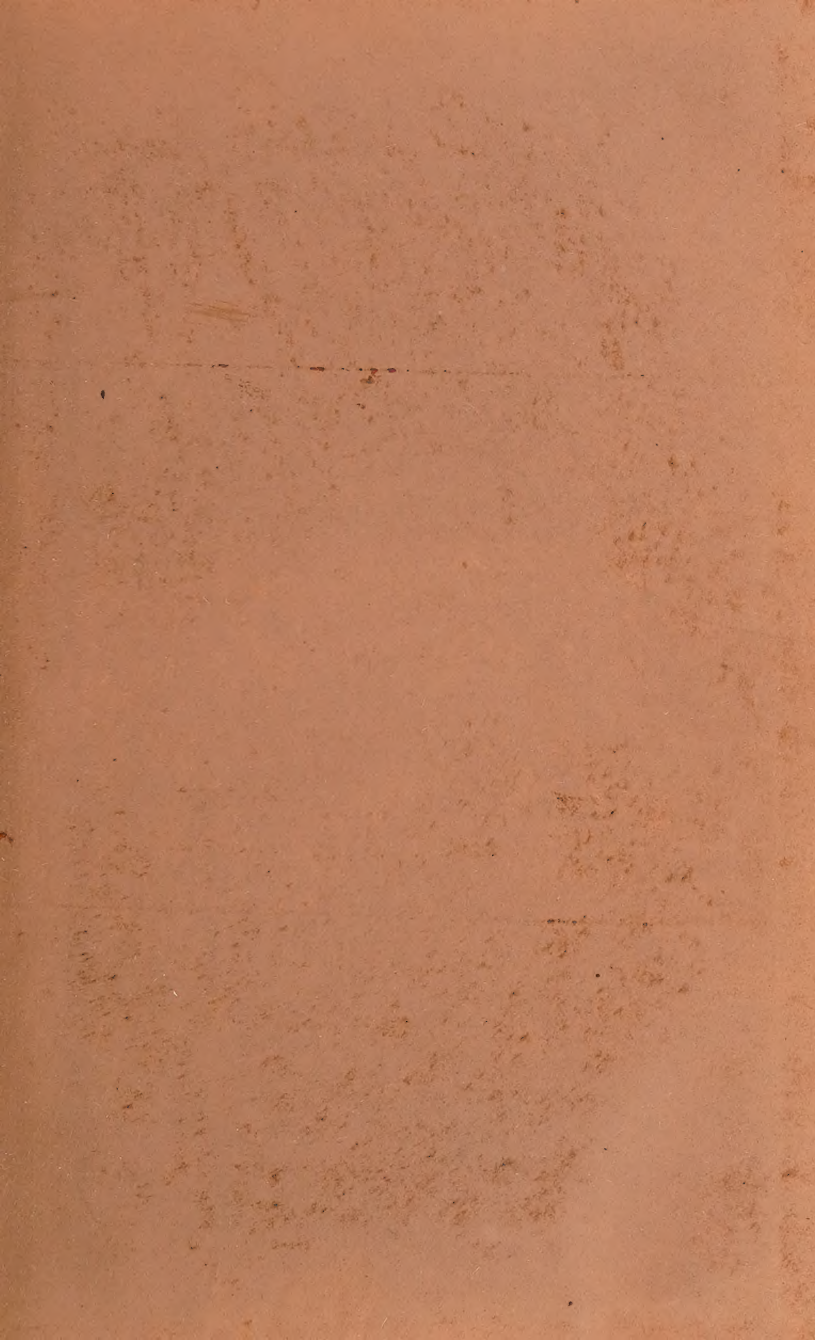



FANTOCCINI



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FANTOCCINI.



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FANTOCCINI.

BY

FRANK BARRETT.

“ Here there is a show called *Fantoccini*, which hath for its Object the Amusement of the Idle, wherein a number of Puppets set forth a variety of short Plays—Sentimental and Heroick, Tragick and Comick, &c.—but with such Quaintness as rather to *burlesque* than to Realize the Manners and Emotions of Men.”

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 8, CATHERINE STREET, STRAND.

1874.

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PRINTED BY TAYLOR AND CO.,
LITTLE QUEEN STREET, LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS.

TO MY FRIEND

Lionel Brough,

I INSCRIBE THESE VOLUMES WITH FEELINGS OF AFFECTIONATE
REGARD AND ADMIRATION.

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The Ring of King Dorilas.



FANTOCCINI.

THE RING OF KING DORILAS.

PROEM.

DORILAS, the wisest king that ever reigned in Lydium, lay on his deathbed. By his bedside stood his children and the magnates of the land. His boys bent down and kissed his noble brow; his daughters pressed their quivering lips on his; the nobles reverently touched his hand. Once again he was entreated to name a successor, for it was thought that surely one so wise must know who was fittest to fill his empty throne. But King Dorilas shook his head. Presently, as if inspired, he rose upon the bed and drew the ring from his finger.

“Who can wear this ring, him obey,” he said, and through the open window he flung the ring.

I.

In the east end of Lydium lived a cobbler named Riddledum—a good-natured, hard-working, unlucky cobbler. Nature had made his disposition buoyant, and Providence supplied him with abundance of ballast in the shape of miseries, as if to prevent his floating up into Paradise before others. He lost the little money he had saved through a commercial failure, and his fruitful wife through the jaundice; his house had twice been burned down, and an opposition opened round the corner. To make poor Riddledum’s ruin complete, it became the fashion with ladies to wear no boots whatever;* and as most of the women in Lydium had pretty feet, the fashion obtained very generally.

* This was due to the influence of the press. A paper having declared that boots were a convincing proof of modesty in the ladies of Lydium, they discarded them thenceforth.

Unfortunately, too, Mrs. Riddledum had not departed this world before bringing into it ten children, two pairs and six odd ones, as their father classified them, and all of the most durable material.

Riddledum's house was of the most unpretentious character; it comprised but two rooms. In one the children slept, in the other their father passed his days and nights. This latter was the shop, and its stock of goods for sale was as simple as the little cobbler who sat in the midst of them. But his show was attractive, for it reflected the merry heart of Riddledum in the inscriptions plentifully dotted about. Over an elegant pair of high-lows the public was asked, "If you can buy this kind of article for half a stiver of Riddledum, why pay more?—why not pay Riddledum?" Upon a pair of obviously mended shoes was written "soled again!" and over the doorway "odd boots re-paired." Particularly indicative of the little fellow's amiability was the notice, "No connection with the party round the corner!" Any other cobbler would have

written, "No connection with a contemporaneous robber."

The sun was sinking. Riddledum set aside the ticket he was writing—alas! he had no better employment now—and taking a basin in one hand and a spoon in the other, he went to the shop door and rattled the crockery. It was the signal to his children to come to tea. A poet by nature, the cobbler frequently put his thoughts into rhyme. "Ah!" he reflected, catching sight of his youngest twins sitting in a gutter down the narrow lane opposite, "naturally the little loves are larking up the alley; for with their innate sense of strict propriety, they chose that slight approach to *court* society." He spoke in numbers and the numbers came: his ten children trooped into the shop. When he had kissed them, he counted them up to see that all were present, and bade them sit down on the floor and prepare for tea. Suddenly he remembered that they had eaten the last of their loaf for breakfast and that nothing edible was in the house, and nothing convertible in his pocket.

He couldn't for the world break the doleful news to the children instantly, but he felt himself a hypocrite as he dealt round the empty plates.

"Have you been enjoying yourselves, dears?" he asked.

"Yes, and we're so hungry," answered Fumbo, a small child with a disproportionately large interior.

"I'm glad you're hungry," said Riddledum, adding remorsefully to himself, 'What a fib!' "It's right that we should relish our humble fare. Ah! we poor folks are blessed with appetites, and we ought to be thankful for that." He prolonged his discourse until Fumbo began to whimper, and then, under the pretence of going to the larder, he went into his shop and there seated himself, sadly gazing on the rows of boots with a rueful look.

"Ah, me!" he thought "would that we could live as Frenchmen do—on broths prepared exclusively from *chou*! I've heard of fried soles, and also of stewed eels; but these are far too leathery tough for human food.

If I were anything but a weak old fool, I should be able to tell 'em that nothing is the digestible article they have for a meal." Whilst he was striving to find an excuse, he found that which was far better—a hunk of bread at the bottom of an old wellington. It was a breakfast which, in the prosperous past, he with characteristic prudence had put away for an emergency like the present. With a beating heart and a joyful laugh, he returned to his children; and having cut the bread into ten equal portions, distributed it amongst them, and sat down to enjoy the crumbs. He soon finished them; so, his mouth being unoccupied, he was able to chat gaily and cut jokes while the children were eating; that was a comfort. He was so lively and cheerful and the youngsters were so hungry that his having nothing better to do escaped the notice of all excepting Koralie. She couldn't eat for the emotion that filled her tender heart, and presently she crept to her father's side and slipped her crust into his hand. Riddledum looked at the crust and then at Koralie; the eyes of both were

filled with tears. By this time Fumbo—who, with the happy faculty of the ostrich, could swallow the hardest substances without the fatiguing process of mastication—was crying for more, so Riddledum set himself to be funnier than ever, but, at last unmanned by Fumbo's melancholy wail, he broke down in the middle of a comic song, and, saying he would fetch them more food, betook himself again to the shop. Long time and patiently the children waited, but at last, led by the fogleman Fumbo, they set up a unanimous howl. Koralie rose and going into the shop found Riddledum, with his head buried in a heap of boots, crying more piteously than little Fumbo.

“ Shall I put the little ones to bed, papa?”

“ Yes, do, my love. They needn't sit up to supper, I'll come and kiss 'em when you've tucked 'em up.” After saying this, he pretended to be very busy over an old shoe, and whistled manfully; but his tuneless effort quavered and shook, and occasionally he had to brush away a tear with the corner of the

shoe he was engaged upon. When the children came to the door to say good night, all he could do was to wave the shoe to them; and when Koralie had taken them away and closed the door, he once more buried his face amongst the boots, and gave way to grief.

Whilst he was lying thus an old woman entered the shop, and noticing Riddledum's preoccupation coughed slightly. In a moment he was on his legs; but so good a man of business was he, that not even the unusual and astounding appearance of a customer in his shop interfered with the exercise of his faculties. He rubbed his hands together as all good shopmen do, and with an amiable smile said briskly, "Good evening, ma'am—excuse me I entreat—so very busy really! Take a seat!" he pointed to the floor, the only available thing to sit on in the place, and before the little old lady could say a word he rattled on, "What may I have the pleasure of doing for you? Ah, I see you want a pair of shoes. Behold the fruit of industry—a *pair*. Ha, Ha, hum! will you try this on?" The old woman

shook her head, and the volatile little cobbler laughed and said, with a wink of his twinkling eye, "I comprehend. You don't intend to put your foot in it! Oh! I've other kinds, you know; a man who boasts a lively business shouldn't be 'out of sorts.' Ha, Ha! now these slippers are the best we have—ahem! there's only one. Ah! we can't get them made fast enough—demand's so very enormous!"

"I don't want any slippers," said the little old lady.

"Of course you don't," said the incorrigible cobbler, "any one can see that you are not a slippery customer. Excuse me if I poke my fun a little too far; but a boot with me is a kind of stand-in joke. Have you something wants cobbling?"

"Alas!" said the old lady, "I have no shoes to cobble. I'm only an unlucky beggar."

With an exclamation of despair, Riddledum sank to the ground.

"Yes; I'm am unlucky weak old beggar."

"Weak beggars are seldom fort'nate ones," murmured Riddledum, who under no circum-

stances could let pass an opportunity for a bad pun.

“All my life I have been vainly seeking for a charitable friend.”

“Ah! rich friends always do keep us at a distance.”

“Footsore and weary I came into this city, and here I implore your help.”

“Ah, me!” said the cobbler “what can I do for you? I too am in a wretched state of insolvency. I’ve no trade. Boots that should go on feet all hang on hand. And there appears no probability of business improving; although I admit my trade is mending. I’ve really nothing ma’am to give away!”

“Nothing.”

“Not to day, ma’am.”

“Do you send me away hungry as I am? deny me a crust!” said the old woman in a tone of anguish that went to the cobbler’s tender heart, as she turned to go.

“Stay, Mrs. What’s-your-name!” called Riddledum deeply affected, “stay, your sorrows burst my heart. Here, aged but respected

female, take my only crust, which I had resolved to carefully eke out!" he produced Koralie's gift, and as he gave it to the beggar said reflectively, "it might have lasted 'till Tuesday week!"

"Noble Riddledum! how can I repay you? Alas! I know not. Yet stay—coming here I found a ring. I cannot wear it, and if I try to sell it, I may be accused of theft. It is dirty and perhaps worthless. So as it is of no use to me, but probably rather the reverse, I will give it to you. Take it, and" added the old lady, tears of gratitude choking her utterance "much good may it do you."

As soon as she was gone Riddledum set about polishing the ring, and when he had removed the dirt it glittered vastly. The more he rubbed, the more brilliant it became, until at last it dazzled him to look at it. He put it on his finger and held it at a distance, observing the effect. But the effect was even greater than he could have imagined. For at that moment Darby, the chief of police, and Ferret, the inspector of nuisances, who, *incognito*,

were passing the cobbler's stall at that moment, caught sight of the cobbler extending his hand magnificently before them, and beheld upon his finger the resplendent ring. Their astonishment at the sight of the long lost and precious gem, rendered them powerless for a moment, but no sooner had they recovered their wonted equanimity, than, uncovering their heads, they entered the shop and saluted the little shoemaker with a profound bow. Riddle-dum perceiving that they were fine gentlemen, and that their boots were of a very superior make, politely said, "Excuse me, gentlemen, but—but you've come to the wrong shop."

"The shop is nice enough," said the inspector of nuisances, who but two moments before had determined to condemn it, "but that is not what we respect. It is that ring which commands our reverence."

"Dear me ! how taken these fine fellows are with a little bit of trumpery," thought Riddle-dum.

"Pray do us the honour," said Darby, "to

favour us with your first commands. What can we do. How may we help you?"

"Oh! that would puzzle a conjuror to tell you; I haven't enough to do myself. You see trade's so bad. Otherwise, as you seem so anxious about it, I'd willingly give you a job. No doubt you're very decent cobblers."

"But cannot we help you in another way? Is there nothing you desire?"

"I should think there was," answered Riddledum, placing his hand on his useless stomach.

"Tell us what it is. Would you like to be a king, an emperor, or the president of a republic?"

"No, thank you," a vulgar yet expressive wink; "I would rather be a cobbler than a king. We may suffer when the fashion comes in to wear no boots, but that's nothing to what a king must suffer when the fashion sets in of wearing no heads. No; I should like to be a miller. The custom of eating is one that's likely to last a man's lifetime; and while

there's corn to be ground the miller need not starve."

"Do you really desire to be nothing greater than a miller?"

"Nothing greater than a good fat one."

"And when?"

"Well, one can't be fat in a moment, but I'd like to go into training at once."

"You shall not wait five minutes," and the chief of police ran off in one direction, and the inspector of nuisances in the other,—each eager to be first in serving him who now wore
THE RING OF KING DORILAS.

II.

Riddledum was put in possession of a fine mill, and when he had been a miller for six weeks, he was grown so fat that you wouldn't have known him. I say *you*, because you are not influenced by the selfish motives of those who had neglected him in his adversity. They, you may be sure, did not forget their friend in his altered condition. Every one knew

him; and for the first few days he made no flesh at all, so fatigued was he with shaking hands and making himself pleasant to his visitors. The grandest people in the kingdom came to him, advising all manner of schemes for his happiness; but Riddledum was wise and declined them all, for in one way or another, the adviser was to take a prominent part in the arrangement he advised, and Riddledum felt that this would not be consistent with perfect felicity. Also he felt—though he was far too polite to advertise his feelings—that if these aids to happiness were away, he should not know what unhappiness meant. Patiently he bore the crowds of visitors, who bored him; but each day their numbers increased. They sat on the millstones; they sat on the wheat it was impossible to grind; they sat on the steps outside, and filled the barns. He could not find time to eat, and saw nothing of his children. He said to himself, “Something must be done to stop this, or I shall be worse off than ever.”

On the fourth day he locked his doors, deter-

mined to admit no one. He called his children about him, and ate a breakfast in peace and quiet; that is, in as much quiet as the roar of the multitude waiting for admission would allow of. Riddledum had resolved he would see no visitors; but, on the other hand, the visitors had resolved they would see Riddledum, and hardly had he finished breakfast when he beheld Darby and Ferret kneeling at his feet. They had scaled the sails and entered the mill by the little window in the top. The miller dropped his toothpick and looked in despair through the window at the side; the population of Lydium was following in the footsteps of the chief of police and the inspector of nuisances, and was swarming up the mill-sails. Riddledum lost patience.

“Oh! look here, you know,” said he in a voice like that of Mr. J. L. Toole, “I can’t stand this. Are you inspector of nuisances?”

“Sire, I am.”

“Then just inspect that.”

“Ah! very annoying,—hindrance to business. Must put a stop to this!” said the

inspector sternly. Then he whispered three words to the chief of police.

“Run ’em in?” asked the latter who, as police are, was sometimes a little hard of hearing.

“No. Out, if you please,” suggested Riddledum.

The chief bowed respectfully, considered a moment, and then mounted quickly into the upper part of the mill. He was a man of quick perception and immediate action, and before his intentions could be suspected, he had set the sails to the wind. Presently Riddledum saw a great falling off of his friends, and was content. Meanwhile, with equal energy, Ferret had found a bottle of blacking with which he wrote on a board :

NOTICE.

No admittance except on business.

N.B.—*Beware of the Police.*

This he hung from the window, and throwing open the door, displayed the chief of police standing with a drawn truncheon. In this way Riddledum obtained the degree of seclusion he

required, and rapidly fattened and improved in appearance. He ground wheat so well and stole so little of it, that he never wanted for customers; and, after paying all bills, had money to put away for his children. For though he governed Lydium, he took from the people, except in return for grinding their corn, nothing. Governing gave him little trouble, and yet he contrived to govern well. Every morning Ferret waited upon him with a list of the nuisances he had discovered in the previous day, and, seated on a sack, Riddledum considered them and told Darby how to abolish them. "Any one who is not a rogue can see the difference between right and wrong; and any one who is not a fool can see which is best to do," he said; and on these principles he ruled, and, strange as it may appear to us in this enlightened time, the duties of his chief ministers became lighter every day. For some time Lydium and Riddledum lived in perfect happiness.

The miller's children too improved prodigiously. They went to school and the interest-

ing Fumbo never cried because of having insufficient to eat. When he did lift up his voice in anguish, it was, dear little soul, from having eaten rather too much. Koralie, of whom so little has yet been said, but of whom so much is to be told, was the least changed by the altered condition of their life.

Under the most trying circumstances she had been cheerful and sweet-tempered, and now she could be no more so. There was a little more colour in her fair smooth cheeks, and her arms were rounder; her figure, too, expanded, for she was getting into womanhood, but nothing could add to the lustre of her beautiful big dark eyes. Koralie was perfectly good; but she was not unearthly. There was mirth as well as purity in her clear healthy open face; and her sweet mouth looked as if it might be kissed by a sweetheart; which is how every good girl's mouth should look. She had no appearance of dying; and I am glad to tell that she thought more about this world than any other. All about her loved her; how could they or any one else do other-

wise? Her father's only anxiety was to add to her happiness, and to this anxiety perhaps may be attributed all the subsequent calamities that came upon him. Good simple souls of this kind, in leading those they love to happiness, too frequently, by fixing their eyes upon the goal, become oblivious to the dangers beneath them, and fall, dragging with them those they seek to save. Ah! me, it is a very doubtful kindness this dragging of one's friends up to the ethereal glories of the Matterhorn. The chances are that some one's neck will be broken, and then who will forgive you if it is your friend's; and who pity you if it is your own? Poor frank, honest-hearted Riddledum, why wast thou not content to leave thy daughter in the happy valley?

One morning he asked of his children, "Where is Koralie?"

"Milking the cow, father." (Riddledum kept a cow, likewise a pig, and also a cock with a seraglio).

"Hum!" said the miller; then he added to himself, "She mustn't work so hard now I'm so

rich. I'll have another mill constructed which shall be regardless of expense erected. Then that shall be by wheels and straps connected with apparatus fixed amongst the greenery, and so I'll have that cow milked by machinery!" The morning passed, but not a turn did the millstones make. He cogitated the whole time upon expedients for giving happiness to Koralie. She had been his comfort and support when his wife died, and though but a few years older than the eldest of the other children, she had tended them with the care of their mother. All through his period of poverty she had cheered and heartened him; so gratitude and a far deeper feeling urged him to provide for her happiness. Meanwhile a yet more powerful emotion was influencing another in her behalf.

The paddock in which Riddledum's cow pastured was bordered by the grounds of the richest nobleman in Lydium. By creeping through a gap in the hedge one could reach an avenue, and looking down this avenue, a beautiful lawn, in the middle of which was a

great spreading yew-tree, could be seen. I have said that Koralie was not unearthly, and a very earthly thing in a young maiden is curiosity. This motive first led Koralie to discover the existence of the avenue and lawn and yew-tree ; and she was in the constant habit either before milking the cow, or after milking the cow, and occasionally both before and after, of creeping through the gap, stealing through the avenue, and peeping round a corner up to the beautiful lawn with the yew-tree in the middle.

Handsome as the yew-tree was, there was nothing in that to command so much attention ; but there was very frequently something under it that excited in this peccant little trespasser the profoundest—reverence shall I say ? There, studying a book with a fine crimson and gold cover, sat the very handsomest fellow eyes ever saw. How after feasting upon this vision—she ruminated and hungered to feast again, perhaps those young ladies who have experienced a first delightful, stolen, impracticable love passion may be able to understand.

She willingly would have stood in that back-aching position, gazing on her love the whole day, but for the fear of discovery. The beating of her heart seemed to choke her as she crept to the alley, with love and the fear of not seeing him, and the fear of being seen. At length the morning came when her heart seemed to cease beating altogether. He was not beneath the yew. She waited twice as long as she usually allowed herself, and then, clasping her hands, a deep sigh came from her heart and she retraced her steps. When she was gone, the beautiful youth laughed and stepped into the path from behind the bush, where he had concealed himself on seeing the girl approach. That morning his studies were not so engrossing ; several times he closed his book, looking into vacancy and thinking of that morning's episode. Four weary days passed, and Koralie saw nothing of her brave love. On the fifth morning she summoned up her courage, and stole right up the alley to the lawn. "Now," she thought, "I shall see him. He has moved from under that dark old yew-

tree into the golden sunlight." No, no—not a soul was upon the lawn. All the sweet hope flew from her heart, and bitter despondency occupied its place. Could she ever be happy again! Could she find any pleasure in the world now he was gone! Why had this paradise gleam come to discontent her with the calm sunshine of her ordinary existence? Who now was gazing on that beautiful face? Why was she a poor weak girl? Why was she not a man that she might seek all over the world for beautiful Hyrilon, and find him and make him her brother? Her dimpled chin sank on her breast, and the tears trickled down her fair white cheeks, as she slowly walked down the dark avenue that led from as well as to the bright lawn. There was no sympathiser with her in her grief; no one to say a kind word to her, and she did so need comfort and kindness. She said to herself, "Poor Koralie, poor Koralie!" And the sound of her own voice, saying these words of pity, wrung her heart with delicious sadness; and resting her head upon her arms, she leant them against a tree

and cried. It is just as pleasant to weep when you are miserable as it is to sing when you are happy ; but before Koralie had really begun to enjoy her performance she felt a soft touch gently sliding over her smooth head, and heard a voice—oh ! so sweet and low !—say, “ What distresses you, little one ? ”

No need had she to lift her eyes to see who stroked her head so gently—no hand could be so tender, no voice so soft and musical, that was not possessed by one as perfect as Hyrilon. And could two such exist ! But she did lift her eyes, and like a blue-eyed convolvulus looking through its dew-drops at the morning sun, she gazed through her tears upon the glorious beauty of her love.

With all the high-flown eloquence of the romantic period, Hyrilon addressed the trembling Koralie :

“ Do you know you are trespassing ? and that trespassers are prosecuted with the utmost rigour of the law, hey ? ” he said, “ and are you aware that man-traps and spring-guns are set in these woods ? also that the police have

strict orders to take into custody any person or persons found in these preserves ? ”

Here was a disillusion for the poor girl : this divine being had a soul for business and was his own gamekeeper.

“ What was your object in coming here ? ” he continued sternly. Koralie could not answer.

“ Do you know ‘ the utmost rigour of the law ’ ? ” he asked, looking at Koralie’s pretty red kissable lips.

“ No, I don’t indeed.”

“ Ah ! it is too terrible to speak about. But I shall have to exact the full penalty unless you can give me a satisfactory reason for your being here. And even then I don’t know that I shall be able to let you off. Why, I have watched you these past four days ! any one can see that you are a desperate character—by your eye (a tear still stood there)—now, then, what have you been looking for ? ”

He had held his soft hand on her head all this time rather to her surprise ; but now it slowly slid downwards, and she anticipated that

tight grasp upon her collar which would be consistent with his professed appreciation of her character. But his hand descended no lower than her throat, where it rested with gentle pressure. Then it struck her that he was not in earnest, and that after all it was not business nor gamekeeping that possessed his soul.

“Now, then, dreadful culprit, look me in the eyes, and tell me what you came for to see !”

She could not tell him that, but she could look him in the eyes, and probably they answered the question, for he asked no more. But the penalty was exacted ; and Koralie, under the infliction, would have sunk to his feet in delirium but for the strong arm that clasped her to the breast of beautiful Hyrilon. So whilst Riddledum was racking his brains for the benefit of his daughter, her happiness was being administered to by some one who was not her father.

That evening when the children were in bed, and Riddledum with Koralie was sitting

in the mellow twilight, the girl passed her arm round her father's neck and said, "Father dear, I want to tell you something."

Riddledum pressed her hand.

"I—I—I love," she began, and in faltering happy words went on to tell everything, her arm clinging to his neck and her hand lying in his. Through her tale the gentle pressure never relaxed, and when she hesitated a kind word encouraged her in her confidence. When she had told all, Riddledum kissed her burning cheek and bade her dream happily; and wished that her happiest vision might be less than the waking reality. Indeed he was rejoiced that the child he loved so well, and who was so worthy of happiness, was so happy. Yet he could not remove from his heart the weight that lay there. For fifteen years had he loved and cherished this little maid, and one had appeared who in one week could earn a love deeper than that he had obtained after all those fifteen years. What had Hyrilon done for her to be so loved? and in what did he excel that for him she would leave her gentle

father for ever? The night had no chill for him; he sat where Koralie had left him conscious of nothing but a sense of loneliness and desolation. It was his custom always to kiss his children at night, and, at length, the omission on this night occurred to him. He rose and felt his way to Koralie's bed-chamber. Her regular breathing indicated that no pain lurked in her heart. He bent over her and kissed her. She partly awoke and turned.

"Good night, dearest," he said, resting his face upon the pillow in the warmth of her breath.

"My darling," she murmured, pressing her lips to his wet cheek.

* * * * *

When Ferret and Darby presented themselves on the following morning, Riddledum asked, "Do either of you know Hyrilon?" Ferret scratched his head and looked up; Darby bit his thumb and looked down; then both answered, "No!"

"If he were in the habit of encouraging itinerary musicians or lecturing the working

classes, or anything in that way, I suppose you would have heard of him."

"Certainly," replied the inspector; "it would have been my duty to do so. To the extent of my knowledge, no *objectionable* party of that name exists."

"Or if he had ever thrashed a farm-labourer, or spent a night and five shillings for the accommodation, in one of your stations—"

"I should remember the circumstance," said the chief of police—"but I don't."

Riddledum's countenance expressed regret. His faithful servants, ever anxious to please, begged to know if their exertions could be used to discover particulars relative to the individual.

"No," said Riddledum, "it is sufficient that you are unacquainted with him. He must be a very estimable young man. I wished for the particulars, gentlemen, because he is about to wed my daughter.

"Your daughter!" exclaimed the two in dismay; each had hoped to get Koralie for himself.

“Yes ; you *don't* see anything objectionable ? Do you ? ” he asked with a slight accent of hope in his despondent tone.

“ Ahem ! ” coughed Ferret.

“ Aha ! ” coughed Darby.

“ If there is any just cause or impediment, I shall be very glad—very glad indeed if you will tell me.”

“ Sire, this young man is obscure ; no one has ever heard of him,” said one.

“ That’s a recommendation,” thought Riddledum.

“ And we both know a hundred celebrities who would be delighted to form such an alliance,” said the other.

“ But they occupy an entirely different pair of boots,” said Riddledum, and added, “ I wish they didn’t.” He could have dealt with the hundred friends in a sweeping, summary, and satisfactory manner.

The two friends left in company. When they were sufficiently far from the mill not to be heard by the miller, Ferret said to Darby, “ This is a sad business.”

“For you,” said Darby, who was surly as a bear.

“Oh! there’s more than one fox prowls round a hen-house,” said Ferret, with a significant wink.

“Well, as neither will get her, there’s no need to be envious.”

“There would be a chance for one of us if the third party were out of the way.”

“We must both act in concert, though.”

“Oh! of course.”

“Then, when he’s out of the race, we can both start fair, and let the best man win.” Darby had a very good opinion of himself.

“Just so!” Ferret flattered himself that he was as clever as most people.

“But one must do nothing in the matter without the knowledge of the other.” Darby thought the inspector was wily.

“Of course there must be no underhand work here.” Ferret believed the other was sly.

“Then we are to act in concert.”

“Entirely.”

“Agreed.”

The two shook hands and went opposite ways. When Ferret had turned a corner, he jumped over a hedge and made straight for the mill. When Darby lost sight of his friend, he sprang over a ditch and was back by Riddledum's side in two minutes. The miller was in the upper story, and as Darby ascended he noticed one rundle of the ladder loose. With marvellous celerity he whipped it out, cut a piece off one end, and replaced it in such a manner that it would give way under pressure. Then he stepped over it, and entered the room where Riddledum was at work.

"May I speak a word in private with you?" asked Darby.

"Yes. No one comes up here."

"Except the inspector of nuisances. If you will allow me, I'll shut down this hatch—like that; and bolt it—so."

"What do you want?"

"Sire, I wish to speak to you concerning your beautiful daughter. I should have spoken before but for the presence of that Ferret. He, as an interested party, is not to be trusted in this affair."

“Interested party—Hark ! what’s that ?”

“Oh ! that noise is only Ferret tumbling down the ladder. I say interested party, sire. His object is to secure a wife for himself and another for you.”

“Really, he’s very kind.”

“He wants to marry your daughter and unite you to his late wife’s mamma. Now, though it is highly proper that your daughter should marry, and that the blank in your home should be filled by a suitable comfort in the shape of a nice young wife —”

[“Dear me,” parenthesised Riddledum, with a grin, “I never thought of that.”]

“Still,” continued Darby, “neither he nor his mother are people to encourage. In your government and manner of living, you show yourself a true republican—a working man, and one of the people. Now this inspector of nuisances has actually royal blood in his veins ; at least, he pretends so, and to hear an aristocratic inspector call you “papa” would be insupportable.”

“Oh ! be satisfied,” said Riddledum ; “I shall spare myself.”

“And for the same reason, you will spare your daughter, hey?”

“My daughter will wed Hyrilon.”

“You will not marry her to a prince. You would not expose that sweet girl to the sneers of this Hyrilon’s supercilious and over-educated friends? Do you think this bloated aristocrat would ever suffer you, a poor honest working-man, to enter his house? No, he would forbid his wife—your daughter, mark!—ever again to see her good but toiling father. Oh! I married a wife beneath me, so I know what it is.”

“There’s something in what you say.”

“Yes, and I’ll say more when I see you alone again. But don’t tell Ferret. You go down that way; I’ll drop out of the window.”

When Ferret had recovered consciousness after his fall, he set his wits to work. Presently he went outside the mill, and looking up saw the window in the upper story. A tub of tar was standing ‘near with the top out. With some difficulty he moved it directly under the window, and covered it over with three

rotten boards. Then he smiled, and taking his seat in the mill, quietly waited for Riddledum. Not a moment had he sat there when the hatch opened, and the miller descended alone, as the inspector had expected.

“I’ve come,” said Ferret, taking Riddledum into a corner and speaking low, “to tell that which I could not in the presence of Darby.”

“Indeed !”

“Yes ; he, though a good man, is naturally influenced by selfish motives.”

“What’s that ?” asked Riddledum, referring to a sudden crash and a muffled curse from the outside.

“Only the chief of police in the tar-barrel. As I was saying, he’s influenced by somewhat selfish motives.”

“With regard to whom ?”

“You and your daughter. He wants to make your charming daughter his second wife, and make up a match between you and his divorced wife, in order to save the alimony.”

“This is too much,” murmured the miller.

“Rather. Now the fact of your retaining the

ring of King Dorilas and choosing to live in this seclusion shows your regal propensities, and your scorn of the petty *nobility* of this kingdom. You naturally say to yourself, 'Rather than mingle with these upstart, arrogant little nobodies, I will live in simplicity and show myself somebody.' Is it likely you will wed any one unconnected with some one having a little real royal blood in him? No; and in the same way with regard to your daughter."

"What of her?"

"You would not suffer a little prince with pitiful condescension to demand her hand of you when, by a word, you may show yourself in splendour that would eclipse all kings that have ever preceded you, and deign to bestow your child on one who has not only true nobility of nature, but the blood of kings in his heart?"

"There's something in that," said Riddledum.

"I will not detain you any further at present; but at a future time—"

“Yes, yes, yes ! Go away, I want to think.”

Then Riddledum sat down and thought and thought for eighteen hours, and the result was, that when the inspector of nuisances, who limped slightly and leant on a stick, and the chief of police, whose legs were arrayed in new nether garments, walked into the mill on the following morning, he extended his hand, on which flashed the ring of King Dorilas, and said, “Prepare instantly the royal palace. Let it be fitted in a manner worthy to receive the greatest of monarchs. Prepare the robes and crown, and bid the Archbishop—”

“Sire, you ordered that nuisance to be abolished the week before last,” hinted Darby.

“True. Well, order the maid to lay out the coronation robes, with a clean pair of socks. I’ll conduct my own coronation. Henceforth I am KING RIDDLEDUM.”

The two ministers, having saluted him with the profoundest reverence, rushed away to do his bidding.

“Ha, ha !” said the inspector, pausing be-

side a post to laugh, "he has preferred my advice ; so, Mr. Darby, I have triumphed, although you did bark my shins !"

"Ha, ha !" chuckled the chief of police, doubling himself up with laughter, "I've got my way, in spite of that fool of a Ferret with his filthy tar-barrel.

III.

King Riddledum's palace was the grandest in the world, and his establishment was magnificent. He had a major-domo and three hundred and sixty-four servants. Each servant was so grand that he had a servant under him to do his work. There was one exception by which the number was limited to 364 ; the 364th had no servant ; and of course on this insignificant wretch all the work of the others devolved, it will be thought. But it was otherwise ; for every servant was allowed to take a day's holiday once in the year, so that if the 364th was not taking his day, the major-domo or one of the 363 was, and consequently no order

could be transmitted to the individual whose duty it was to obey it. So the king had to do just as much as if he had no servants at all, and indeed—if you think of it—rather more. He was industrious by nature, and it rather pleased him than otherwise to find, after sitting for the whole of the first day of his reign on a throne doing nothing at all, that he must toast his own herring for breakfast the next morning, and do the house-work after. Besides all these grand servants he had a queen. Acting upon the advice of Darby and Ferret he had taken a wife; but no relative of theirs. His queen was a showy, nanasome, vain woman; but as she could not love, and he could not hate, and neither cared a rush for the other, the queen gave the king no more trouble or concern than the king gave the queen. She was content to lie on a couch the whole day long, listening to the flatteries of Ferret and Darby; and as Riddledum was neither desirous of flattering or being flattered, he felt no jealousy, but scrubbed his floor and washed up his tea-things in surly indifference. It was harder work than he had

ever been used to, for he would not suffer his children to help him as of old. He as a king had the divine right to do as he liked with the pails and brushes, but princes and princesses could not be allowed to descend to menial employments. So they wandered about the palace, each as smart as a carrot, whilst the king sat in the kitchen with a smut on his nose. At first he would whistle gaily over his work, but as his labours became harder, a feeling that things generally were not as they should be depressed him. He became silent, and fermented inwardly, turning all his good spirits into sour vinegar, as it were. Every day his work increased. Entertainments had to be given, and prepared beforehand; ceremonies had to be performed; petitions to be received; and last of all his advisers insisted that he must learn to spell correctly. Under this accumulation of troubles is it to be wondered at that the cheery smile left poor Riddledum's homely plain face, and that crows' feet appeared in the angles of his eyes, and unpleasant lines about his mouth?

And Koralie, in whose interests he had taken this step, which brought him to such unhappiness, was she happy? Had his singleness of purpose brought him reward in its successful issue? Had he gained for his heart's darling an equivalent of the happiness he himself had relinquished? As something towards perfect felicity he had broken poor little Koralie's heart, and changed the old sweet tie of paternal love for one of a very different kind—for the tie that binds the fanatic to the victim he would apostatise. Acting on the advice of his evil councillors, the first use he made of his power was to banish Hyrilon, as one unworthy his daughter's hand, and dangerous to her interests and his scheme. This he kept secret from Koralie, lying to her when she implored him for tidings of her lover. He said that Hyrilon was a traitor, and had fled when his plot was discovered; and Koralie believed this. She had never heard a lie from her father's lips; how could she doubt him? But her heart died within her, like a wood-flower when the summer is no more, and with

it all the happiness of life. All day she sat in her chair of ivory and gold upon the terrace, listless and impassive, looking vaguely into the horizon where the hills touched the blue sky ; the colour faded from her cheeks, the smile from her lips, the music from her voice. One would have thought her dead but that her eyes were still bright. Riddledum, with the consciousness of his lie, believed his daughter suspected the truth, and that her apathy was the result of mere sulkiness. That she suffered he could not think. She would weep if she were pained, and not one tear did she shed as she sat there. His opinion became confirmed as days went by, and no change took place in her behaviour. She chose this method of resenting his wise interference with her unwise and vulgar inclinations ; and he chose to show her that he could be surly also, and he did. He regarded her as the injurer rather than the injured—an absurdity of the mind that those are prone to who are themselves the injurers. And he determined that he would conquer her stubbornness in its beginning, and oblige her

to marry wisely and as he wished. Thus poor Riddledum, with his good intentions, paved the easiest of roads to the worst of places.

One evening when he had "cleaned himself," and was hoping to have two minutes to himself, the major-domo appeared before him and said, "If it please your Majesty, there's an importunate woman below desiring to see you. She says she won't go away without a row, and knowing your wish to be quiet, I should rather like to know how to act."

"Show her up," said Riddledum, "and a reporter at the same time. I'll show her up also in the papers. Oh! how these worries make my regal head ache—H A K E ache!" The king accustomed himself to exercise orthography on all occasions.

In a short time the beggar and reporter were ushered before the king, who assumed a free and easy attitude with his leg over the back of a chair, and said—merely casting a glance at the old beggar woman—

"Now, antique female, state what you require."

The old woman, after a little hesitation, nervously began.

“If you please, your Majesty, when you kept a little cobbler’s shop—”

King Riddledum sprang to his legs and bade the reporter depart, threatening him with decapitation if he lingered a moment. When he and the major-domo had hastily withdrawn, the king again assumed an elegant position, and said, “Proceed, old girl.”

The beggar was mortal and a woman, and to be called old even by a king was more than her temper could endure.

“‘Old girl,’ indeed!” said she, “you spoke to me in a rather different manner last time we met.”

“We quite allow that our origin was humble,” replied King Riddledum. “But we’re doing quite a different business now. Behold our present shop—lofty and spacious—in every way extensively splendacious!”

“Ah! when I saw you last, you were living in a wretched rookery of very humble dwellings.”

“That’s very true; you might have added that in that rookery I was the great scare-crow.

But since that humble rookery I forsook, I have assumed a far more r-egal look. Not so bad for a king, that," he said to himself with something like a smile ; then, mollified by his own cleverness, he in a kinder tone again begged to know what the old lady desired.

"You remember that when you were in trouble I gave you a ring."

"I have not forgotten the gift, madame."

"Well, now I want you to return it to me."

Riddledum looked at the old lady, then at the ring of King Dorilas, which had never left his finger, and he laughed at the idea of parting with so powerful a treasure, and at the simplicity of the old lady in fancying he would. But when she quietly repeated her demand, a very different expression came into the king's face, and, by means of a dinner-gong which hung conveniently near, he quickly brought the major-domo before him.

"Show this old party the door, and give her enough gold to purchase a hundred rings," he said.

But the old lady who was obstinate, and

rather unreasonable, as old ladies—bless their dear old heads—occasionally will be, pertinaciously continued to demand the ring of King Dorilas.

Then Riddledum became furious, and bade the major-domo show her the inside of a dungeon, and give her nothing but bread-and-water during the royal pleasure, or rather displeasure.

The old lady screamed, but Riddledum, who was as mad as the proverbial hatter, drowned her cries by beating the dinner-gong—his constant practice when enraged. Outside the palace folks knew when there was a quarrel within by the noise the king made; so that, with the vulgar, quarrel and noise became synonymous, and it was said, “There’s a row in the palace” when a disagreement was implied.

When Riddledum was somewhat exhausted, he went on to the terrace outside the royal apartment to cool himself. As he leant his burning brow against the leg of a statue, and fanned himself with his primer, he heard

voices from a part of the terrace hidden from him by an angle of the palace.

“Koralie.” It was the snuffling whine of Prince Fumbo.

“Yes, little one.”

“Come and have a lark. There’s one of the images at the bottom of the garden still got a nose on. You shall have first shy. Oh! don’t shake your head. Why don’t you play with us now? It’s horrid being princes. I’ve always got the stomach-ache. I wish father would move back to the shoe-shop. That was a famous time. Do you remember how you used to take us on the hills to see the sun set, and how we used to take our dinners—”

“Sometimes,” interpolated a voice—it was a twin’s”

—“out into the woods, and spend the whole day in getting nuts? How you used to sing and laugh then! I wish you would sing to us now. There’s none of the girls about here with such a pretty laugh as yours was. We can’t get a nut fit to eat. Wasn’t the bread good, hey? I’m getting sick of cake.” There was

a pause as if the prince were seized with a qualm, and then his charming conversation reopened.

“I hate these fine breeches!” this was accompanied by a sound as of lace being rended from corduroy. “Father ain’t half so nice as he used to be. He’s kind enough to us, but—why, Koralie, what’s the matter?” There was still life in the girl’s heart, and the spark amongst the ashes was fanned by the child’s talk of that past which had been so full of sweetness. She slid her arm about Fumbo’s waist, and laid her hollow cheek upon his head, looking far, far beyond the white clouds skimming before the wind across the heavens into the heavens themselves. Oh, happy past! that dear fatherland to which the sorrowing heart will ever turn, to which one never more may return.

When King Ruddledum heard that he was not half so nice, he thought it quite time to terminate a conversation that could do no good. Moreover, he was just in the humour to behave like a brute and be nasty. So he doubled up

his spelling-book in a form convenient for shying, and bounced round the corner shouting, "Be off!" in a voice as streperous as a policeman's.

"Pap—" murmured Prince Fumbo.

"Do you hear? Be off to bed—B E, double D E," and the king flung the spelling-book after the spelling as if to knock it in. Fumbo shrieked, and Riddledum, like a weak parent, melted in a moment, and kissed the sweet boy tenderly.

"There, don't bellow, there's a dear. I never do take up that book without a desire to pitch into somebody. Forgive me, there's a pet. Now go, and tell the Chancellor of the Exchequer to give you a bag of gold, the which you may lay out in lollipops and suckers. Be off, all of you, except you," he added scowling at Koralie. When the children were gone, he said: "I have some news for you. Listen. You are going to be married."

"Father," exclaimed Koralie, rising to her feet, with clenched hands and the blood in her cheeks.

"Yes; ain't I a nice, kind, indulgent pa?"

“Hyrilon—where is he?”

“Hyrilon—oh! deuce knows—I don’t. No. Your husband is some one a little better than a needy prince. Your husband is quite a different fellow. King Tamarindo is the sweet youth’s name. He’s just answered my advertisement. He is a nice old man; he’s almost as young as I am, and would be a perfect angel if he were not so ugly and bad tempered.”

“Father, I cannot marry this king.”

“Ha, ha! Why?”

“I vowed to marry none by Hyrilon.”

“That was foolish of you; but I’ll have the punishment for perjury revoked, and get you out of the muddle that way.”

“Still, I shall not wed this king.”

“Unnatural offspring! Are these the pretty ways a doting parent taught you? Behold this ring, and obey!”

“That ring has no power to enforce obedience to unjust demands. I will not obey. Oh! father, be good, and kind, and just, as you were in the old, old times. Then who will not obey the wearer of the ring—who will seek to re-

move it? The great and good King Dorilas knew that he only, who was like himself wise and gentle, could wear his ring, and that he who abused its power would lose it."

"Who abuses his power? Who won't obey me? Who seeks to remove it? Who isn't wise and gentle I should like to know? Look here! I've had enough of this kind of thing. You leave my sight, and never dare to look on me again. Hate me in future!"

"Never, never!" Koralie trembled like a leaf. She was very, very weak and ill.

"Go!" roared King Riddledum.

"Ah! me," sighed Koralie, and slowly turned away. When she was out of sight, the king felt his rage subside, and something like compassion and remorse taking its place in his heart. "Old, old times!" he soliloquised mournfully, and the thoughts of his happiness, his love, his child's tenderness came to his mind, and a tear stole into his eye. Then he considered that this was weakness, and unworthy of a king; and determined to banish it from his mind, and show

Koralie that he was as firm as ever, he rushed back to the gong, and exerted himself upon it in such furious style that every one in the palace shook with fear. But when the noise had ceased, and the major-domo, summoning up his courage, entered the royal apartment, trembling like a poodle in the rain, and expecting to receive his own death-warrant and nothing less, his surprise became greater than his terror, for there in the state chair, doubled up with grief, was the king crying like a child.

“Fetch my daughter Koralie,” he commanded, when he had controlled himself sufficiently to speak.

The major-domo departed on his mission ; and Riddledum made a resolution, and as it was a good one, it was pleasing to him to think of it. He beamed with pleasure and his face regained its old sweetness of expression ; and so wrapped was he in anticipating the pleasant results that were to follow the course he was about to pursue—which was nothing less than to tell Koralie the whole truth regarding Hyrilon, and give her the ring of King Dorilas

to do what she would with—that he sat until the sun was sunk thinking of nothing else. At last the major-domo returned, and told the king that his daughter was nowhere to be found. She had been sought for in every nook and corner of the palace unsuccessfully.

Riddledum blanched with terror, and, in a tone that none dare disregard, commanded a search wider and more general. And all through the night with flambeaux the grounds for miles about the palace were investigated, and still no trace of Koralie could be found. Riddledum went down to the lake, and sat there with an inner consciousness that search beyond that would be useless. Numbed and stricken with an awful sense of guilt and punishment, he sat motionless by the water side through the whole long night. He never asked for tidings of his child; he knew that no tidings could come. During the following day, as party after party returned from vain explorations, they came to the king and found him still silently sitting by the water's edge. When evening returned he was seen to rise,

and like one in a dream he walked into the lake, his arms extended as if to receive into them his unhappy child once again. With difficulty he was saved from drowning and carried home. He was violent, and shouted to those who held him not to separate him from his darling. But shortly he became quite quiet, and the doctor said he was in a fever. All this time the queen lay on her couch, flirting and coquetting with the chief of police and the inspector of nuisances. But in the dead of night she stole to the helpless king's bedside, and twisted the ring from his finger. The next morning she appeared on the royal throne and before all displayed upon her finger

THE RING OF KING DORILAS

“What will your majesty do with respect to the nuisances—I allude to your husband and his children,” asked her faithful minister.

“Send them to Jericho,” said the vulgar queen.

“Yes, your majesty,” answered the chief of police.

IV.

It is a long way from Jericho to Lydium, and by the time poor expatriated Riddledum reached the country of which he once had been the ruler, his utmost endeavours failed to render his boots a place of concealment for his blistered feet. The nine children who followed him were not less dilapidated in their shoes; and this state of the family boots grieved him more than the hard roads and his aching feet. Had he not been a cobbler, and was he not ever neat and tidy? They appeared particularly disreputable now by contrast with those of other people. For it was a gala-day in the town they had entered, and every one was in smart and clean dress. Some charitable soul seeing his and his family's distress had compassionately given him a pair of worn-out kid gloves; but though by doubling his fists he contrived to conceal his fingers, and to display the whole parts of these gloves to the greatest advantage, they failed to entirely redeem his appearance from its deplorable character.

He crept along through back streets ; they were almost deserted. But in one he came upon a cripple who was resting on a door-step.

“ Can you tell me what all this fuss is about ? ” Riddledum asked meekly in a weak quavering voice of the cripple.

“ Aye, that I can,” answered the cripple, “ and you must be strangers in this land not to know also.”

“ That we are ; what country is this ? ”

“ Lydium.”

“ Lydium ! ”

“ Yes ; and the king and the queen—the best and kindest that ever ruled—are travelling through their country, stopping at every town to give to poor souls like us.”

“ Dear me, I never thought she was so good as that.” Riddledum’s mind was referring to the unpromising consort who had banished him. “ Ah ! one may wear a good shoe without knowing it.”

“ I shouldn’t think you would have much difficulty in discovering the difference,” remarked the cripple.

“Is her husband the chief of police or the inspector of nuisances?” asked Riddledum, passing over the cripple’s remark.

“Bless my soul! whom are you thinking about? When did you see a paper last?”

“I don’t read papers, thank you, I never got farther than my spelling book; but it must be six months since I was in this country.”

“Then you must have been here in the reign of King Riddledum?” Riddledum’s modesty permitted him only to cough and reply—“Rather”

“Poor old fool! he was no fitter to be a king than you are. Perhaps you don’t know that his bad wife stole the ring of King Dorilas from him when he was thought to be dying. But she did. And under her the nation suffered more than under her poor old husband; he was only a fool; she was more. At last the people could bear her tyranny and wickedness no longer; so they rose and took the ring of King Dorilas from the bad queen’s finger. Then they searched all over the country for a good man, and when at last they

found one, they begged that he would in future wear the ring. And now the king has married a wife as good as himself, and she has chosen for her wedding-trip this tour of charity amongst her people."

"Ah! perhaps she's partial to cripples!"

"Bless you, she treats all alike—except children." Riddledum's heart fell as he looked at his hungry family.

"To children she is kinder, if possible, than to others. The other day she lifted a little one in her arms, and tears ran down her lovely cheeks as she kissed the poor child and whispered to it: "Once, dear one, I was poor as you."

"Bless that good queen!" said Riddledum, himself affected to tears. For Riddledum's heart was as soft as of old, and kindness touches a tender heart as much as suffering does.

"Perhaps she'll pity my poor little uns," he said. "They're pretty chicks and poor. But can you tell me which way she is to pass?"

"She passes the end of this street; will you come with me?"

“Thank you, no. I’m a poor old creetur, and my young folks have travelled far and are tired. So please excuse our company to-day, sir. Make your bow to the gentleman,” he added to the children, and then remarked to himself as the children bobbed their heads to the cripple, “Ah! we shall learn to be respectful now we’re poor.”

“Father, I’m so hungry,” whimpered Fumbo, the ex-prince.

“So am I,” echoed each of the four twins with a sob.

“There, there, my pretty dears, don’t cry,” said Riddledum, striving hard to set them an example. “I can’t help it; I can’t help it!”

“But not long ago we had more than we could eat.”

“Oh! that didn’t agree with you, and the physician, my loves, ordained a change of diet.” This was a vain attempt to turn their attention by a weak old joke.

“But why did Koralie leave us? She was always so kind and clever. I know if she were here she’d find us food.”

“ Would to heavens she were ! Oh ! my children, my children, I’m a bad, bad, bad old man ! ”

At this moment there came sounds of distant music, and hardly had they hurried to the top of the street and ranged themselves in the gutter, and in a melancholy row, when the band preceding the royal procession passed, and the state equipage appeared. The children began to cry instinctively as they stood there with their caps in hand, but Riddledum implored them not to howl too loudly, lest the queen should be unable to hear his petition. When the carriage was near he raised his weak quavering treble voice, and sang to a tune popular at that time amongst the indigent unemployed :—

“ Take pity on these youthful ones—

I’ve got no work to do ;

Had I a situation, why

I might be *utheful*, too !

(Riddledum had a slight lisp occasionally.)

“ We have no food, nor yet no clothes :
No home likewise also :
Where we expect to go to, why
I really do not know.

“ So pity my large familiee,
And turn away do not,
But take compassion kind on me
And my unhappy lot.

(Here he pointed to his children significantly.)

“ The sorrows which our bosoms fill
Can scarcely be believed ;
The smallest contributions will
Be thankfully received.”

The queen, who wore a light veil, had ordered the carriage to be stayed, and seemed deeply moved by the distress of the poor family, and looked pityingly upon the white-haired old father, as with a handkerchief more ragged than his gloves, which he took from his battered white hat, he delicately wiped the noses of his weeping children, beginning with the eldest and ending with the melancholy

Fumbo. When this act of decency and respect was performed, Riddledum turned to the queen and said, "Oh! for the love of mercy and charity, sweet queen, pity my uninteresting family. I'm blessed with a family of nine; yet, as you see, there's not a prodigy amongst them. Would that, for their sakes, poor little things, they had been born the ugliest little varmint ever seen; how the public would have patronised 'em! If one had but come into the world with two heads, or none at all, we might have been affluent for ever; but as it is, the enlightened public won't give twopence to see the whole family—they're much too pretty and too intellectual, bless 'em." He said this with a blush of pride and pleasure; for nothing can overcome paternal partiality in a father who deserves his fathership.

"Poor, poor old man!" said the king who, as usual when accompanied by the queen, was taken no notice of.

"Oh! don't pity me," cried Riddledum. "Pity only those whose affliction is due to me. It tears my heart to think of what they were

and what they still might be, had I been anything but a vile old brute. Why once I was a miller, and we used to have meat for dinner—think of that!”

“And pudding after,” continued Fumbo.

“Ah! as much as we could eat. And these chicks had a sweet dear sister who used to wash their little faces and set ’em up to table; and with a nice perception of decorum, their little pinafores she’d pin afore ’em.”

“Do you know where she is now?” asked the king.

“Ah! me, no. Only I know that I banished her—I—I—I—” he could say no more for his remorseful emotion.

“Suppose you met her again.”

“Ah! she would forget all that I have done against her. I know that if she lives, she loves me as fondly as ever. She is too good to be unforgiving.”

Then the queen took the king’s hand, and from it a ring, and said to Riddledum, “Take this trifle.” As the old man took the ring and looked on it, he trembled and then clasped it

convulsively to his breast. It was the ring of King Dorilas, and Riddledum was again the mightiest man in Lydium. Then his purpose gave him the strength of a young man, and drawing himself up so that he looked at the moment majestic, he flashed the glittering ring before the lords who were gathered around, and said, "Get food and shelter and a home for these little ones." Instantly they ran to do his bidding. But Riddledum's back again bent, his white head fell, and tears dropped upon his grizzled beard, as he slowly drew the ring from his finger.

"Are you not satisfied?" asked the king.

"Yes, and no, sire!" said Riddledum. "The gift is too great and too little. Take it again, kind, wise king and queen; I am too simple and foolish for such power, and that power is too weak to bring me what only I wish for now."

"What is that?"

"My Koralie, my loving child, my lost, lost darling; it cannot bring her to me again."

"It can do even that," said Hyrilon, who,

by the way, was the king; and he lifted the veil off his bride.

And despite that her eyes were swollen with tears, Riddledum saw in her once more his beautiful Koralie.



Albilda.





ALVILDA.

IF Scotland can boast of its Burns, Scandinavia has equal reason to be proud of its Scalds. Singing their romantic legends, they went from the palace of one king to that of another ; from court to court, even as our own itinerant minstrels travel from alley to alley. Their sagas were sung long after the last Viking was gone to Valhalla, and in every country which and where the Goth had settled. In Norway and in Sweden a saga is relished as much as a *Pickwick* is in England. Iceland, which now produces nothing but *Yokuls*, *Gesers*, and simple folk, still cherishes the memory of the fierce heroes it once sent forth. Nay, even in

England, within the memory of men now living, was sung the rune which the Vikings are supposed to sing on meeting their brethren in paradise :

“ Válhalla, Válhalla,
Válhalla, Válhalla, la la,
Slap, bang, here we are again ! ” etc.

Many of the sagas have been collected by Snorre Sturleson, and others, and are in the national libraries ; but besides these, there are many no less interesting in private keeping. Of these is the saga of Gonger,* surnamed “ the sagacious ” (whether from his sagacity or the number of his sagas is uncertain), which was set down on a vellum in the twelfth century by Jülterhed or Joltered, a monk, and entitled ‘ Alvilda.’ This remarkable story is not included in the *Heimskringla*, although undoubtedly it is based upon fact. The ‘ *Encyclopædia Britannica* ’ mentions it (see art. “ Pirate ”); but with this exception I have seen it referred

* Gonger—*Anglicè* Walker.

to in no work whatever. A literal translation of the saga in full would be wearisome; all that is here attempted is an outline of the story, with quotation of such lines as are most remarkable for their simplicity and beauty. In the liberal translation of these passages, much of the original sweetness of expression has necessarily been lost; but the delicacy of thought has been carefully preserved.

The saga is preluded with an appeal to the tender feelings of all who listen: the Scald protesting that he is inadequate to his task; that he is afflicted with a hoarseness; that his memory is not retentive; that he is incompetent to play without his notes; further he vaticinates a break-down in the middle,* and then commences thus:

“ Upon the festal-board, his arms outspread,
All in a trencher pillowing his head,

* Whether a saltatory performance of this kind was customary in the interval the audience must have required for refreshment is not told.

Midst an assortment, large and somewhat
various,
Of broken victual, slept the king Saparius.
He snored a snore majestic and profound,
And all the courtiers who sat around,
And all who lay beneath that festal-board,
As loud—if less majestically—snored.
Alvilda, beauteous princess ! alone
Remained awake, picking a long beef-bone.”

After a lengthy description of the sleeping king and courtiers, the following tender delineation of the heroine occurs :

“ The daughter of Saparius—for such
The fair Alvilda was, was moulded much
Above girls in the ordinary way ;
In fact her mould was not the common clay.
She would not sew, nor stitch, nor hem, nor
bind,
She wouldn't do fancy-work of any kind,
And such employment she was wont to shirk
Because, she said, she *could not* fancy work.”

The Scald proceeds to point out that her

perfections were rather physical than mental :

“ Church, I regret to say, she didn’t attend,
Nor did she scandalise her dearest friend,
For in detraction she had little skill—
The only thing she ‘ran down’ was a
hill.

Coquettish arts she scorned to exercise,
Nor used the killing power of her eyes
Against her hapless lovers,—much preferring,

When minded so, to hurl with aim unerring
A simple brick against their tend’rer parts,
Breaking their youthful heads and not their
hearts.

She loathed domestic duties : her pursuits
Were limited entirely to brutes.

Music she hated ; but she took delight
In any row connected with a fight,
For boxing-gloves she used (and I deplore
To tell they were the only kind she wore).
All manly offices she could discharge,
But most she loved to navigate a barge,

Accomp'nied by the strongest of her gender,
Selected tough ones from amongst the tender.
Upon her beauty—for she was as fair
As the revolving beauty in a hair-
Dresser's emporium—no time she spent ;
But in her muscular development
She was particular, and for that reason
Supped constantly on mussels when in season.
At present they were not ; and so alone
Awake she sat, and picked a long beef-
bone."

After some particulars respecting the time, which seems to have been even ; the habits of the host, which appear to have been odd ; the weather and the hall, which were dirty ; the saga continues :

"What time there entered in the twilight dim
A stranger youth, genteel, eighteen, and slim,
Who, meeting no one, seeing none, and
hearing
Nought but a snoring diapason—fearing

He might, moreover, chance to trip his toes,
And falling, spoil the outline of his nose—
Halted, and in a gentle voice thus spake :
‘ May I inquire if any one’s awake ? ’

To him Alvilda thus : ‘ Who speaks ? ’
which he

Replies to (ungrammatically) ‘ Me,
Olf, if you please, the son and heir presumptuous

Of Visigoth king Sigarus the bumptuous.
Amongst the Ostrogoths—but quite incog.
Myself, with Balded, worthy pedagogue,
Who waits outside, heels upwards in a bog,
Wherein we fell through this confounded
fog—
Have come.’ ”

He proceeds to tell how his father has sent him with his tutor to spend the long vacation in ^{the} Norway fishing, and concludes thus :

“ Thus ends my artless tale, and you have
heard

How I have lost my way, and what’s occurred.’ ”

Alvilda rises : from the hearth she takes
A blazing pine-log, with the which she makes
For him who lately spake, and by its glow
Surveys him carefully from top to toe ;
Notes with contempt his small unbearded
chin,

And turns her nose up at his rings and pin ;
Then, in a tone of mingled scorn and spite,
Sarcastically asks if he can fight.

To which the youth ingenuous replies,

‘ I can, with one inferior in size,

In courage, and in strength, provided there’s
A chance of getting at him unawares.’

Alvilda turned and strode up to the board
On which her father and his household
snored,

Then with the pine-log at a single stroke
Smashed it to atoms, and her sire awoke.”

She leads the trembling prince before her
father by the ear. His tale again told,

“ Saparius, with the peculiarity

Of people in a state of rude barbarity,

Treated his guest with kindness and much
charity ;

Before the fire makes him take a seat,
And claps warm slippers on his moistened
feet.

And farthermore, with delicate attention
Brings him a pair of which I never mention ;
Gives him a joint, and brings a loving cup
with

Something warm inside to finish up with ;
Pops him in bed and tucks him up serenely,
Then with his fingers snuffs his dip out
cleanly.

Meanwhile, Alvilda, not to be behind
Saparius in actions that are kind,
Went forth into the night, and with a pike
Fished for the missing pundit in the dyke,
And hooked him out : but absence of
vitality,

Through staying too long in that moist lo-
cality,

Unfitted him for farther hospitality.”

For some weeks Prince Olf remains the
guest of Saparius, during which time the king
makes him see all the sights by day, yet so

contrives that he sees double by night. Guest and host participate in mutual pleasures, with a scrupulous nicety not known on this side of the Atlantic. The Scald says,

“They shared a mutual pleasure : both employed

One common tooth-brush which they each enjoyed.”

One joy, however, Olf monopolised :

“He was enamoured of Alvilda. Since
The beauty turned her nose up at the Prince,
He'd been inflamed with love ; his inflammation

Progressing steadily without cessation.

He entertained a passion : so did she,

But different in kind and in degree ;

For while his found expression in a leer,

Of hers the mild exponent was a jeer.

That for this reason he should love the *gal* *

Was psychologically natural.”

* *Gal* is Norse for maiden.

With a prolixity worthy a three-volume novelist, the Scald proceeds to explain why this should be so. He compares the girls Olf had previously met with the lovely creature he now beheld ; alluding to these girls he says :

“ Of whom in each he recognised a humbler
Edition of himself ; as in a tumbler
Or tea-pot’s concave curves one’s charms are
seen

Puny and preternaturally mean ;
Wherefore the love for which they used to
sigh

He lavished on himself exclusively.

He could not love beneath him, but above
His head Alvilda towered ; and his love
Aspired loftily, for hers were charms
He could look up to ; and her brawny arms
He could respect—and did, so much that he
Ne’er told his tale of love for fear that she,
Despite all sacred rites, upon the sly
Might wring his neck when nobody was by.”

At last the time comes for his departure ;

Alvilda is overjoyed, and exhibits her gratitude in a thousand kindnesses to the parting guest :

“ She was not sharp to him, nor was she blunt,
Nor did she bully him as was her wont ;
She stroked his head, and offered to conduct
him
Back to his mamma ; nay, she even chucked
him
Under the chin. He felt himself in clover
To find himself chucked under and not over.”

The infatuated youth believes these kindnesses to represent a reciprocity of sentiment ; and the Scald compares his wrong impressions to that of a damned Scald who hears, in the gleesome shout that follows his last verse, praise to him for singing instead of for leaving off :

“ In the congenial and ruddy light
Of burning pines idly they sat that night.
Alvilda spoke, the while her bright eye grew
Dilated, and her tongue dilated too.

Eloquent she was, sublime, oracular,
Toning with graceful slang the harsh vernacular.

Instilling strength, where language seemed
too weak,

With epithets emphatic and unique.

She told of winning champion-belts and cups,

Of rats, of badgers, and of terrier pups ;

Of larks (nocturnal) and the youthful spree ;

Of fierce encounters with the rude bargee ;

And flights evasive of the powers that be.

Saparius slumb'ring, snored ; but all attention,

His eyes and mouth stretched to their full dimension,

Prince Olf enraptured sat, and never stirred,

Sucking in mutely everything he heard,

Thinking that, could he be a woman, he

Would be precisely such an one as she.*

And so he sat and listened, and his breast

Filled with emotions hard to be supprest ;

He kept them down until he felt he must

* Evidently Shakespeare had heard this saga ; for a curiously parallel passage occurs in 'Othello.'

Give them an instantaneous vent or burst.

(Not otherwise Apollo's rays appear
To act with reference to ginger-beer.)*

When King Saparius yawned, completely
stopping

Olf, who was on the very point of 'popping.'"

I have quoted sufficiently, I think, to show the singular beauty of the original. The story proceeds thus :—

Saparius called for his night-cap and a rush-light. Then Olf, knowing that he must depart by daybreak, and that the king was in the habit of taking his breakfast in bed, bade him farewell, and thanked him for his hospitality. Saparius took much pains to explain that the entertainment was provided for through the civil-list; and that therefore Olf was fully entitled to the civil-est attention. He concluded his speech by asking if there was anything his visitor would deign to take away

* The temperate will be pleased to note the extreme antiquity of this agreeable and innoxious beverage.

with him—any little present that, in the future, would remind him of the past. He warned him not to take the spoons, as they were plundered from a *Brumagem sneken*, or merchantman, from *Britangenland*, and were consequently not worth much. After some hesitation, Olf, with a degree of temerity—the only thing about him, not excepting his kibes, for which he had not given himself credit—asked *Saparius* for nothing less than the Princess *Alvilda*; adding, as he noticed a vicious twinkle in her eye, “and a detachment of police to take care of me.” *Saparius* readily assented; and having given the necessary orders to his major-domo respecting the constables, bade his daughter behave herself, and farewell; and then went to bed. *Alvilda* laughed, snapped her finger and thumb in the face of the terrified Olf, threw a skin over her shoulders, and left the hall. The night was dark, but, as has been hinted, the Princess knew her way about.

She walked for some ten or twenty miles, and called upon numerous friends. Few of these young ladies had retired to rest, for they

were strong-minded females who scorned bed, and whose dispositions were not at all of a retiring kind. Those who were in bed she “knocked up,” as the Gothic phrase goes; indeed, so much knocked up that they appeared very poorly when they did appear. She asked them to go for a walk with her, and she had such a persuasive way, and also such a will, that none refused; so that at the termination of that walk they were a body—strong, numerically and otherwise. In the saga these young ladies are denominated “strappers,” possibly from their apparent ability to leather any one who might be unfortunate enough to offend them. They had arrived at the harbour, in which lay numerous ships, both Snekens and Drakens. Headed, or rather headered, by Alvilda, they immediately plunged into the water, and swam to the largest of the war-barges, or Drakens. As usual, the watch had not stopped on deck, but had “run down” below, and was found in his bunk asleep. As a punishment for his neglect of duty, he was very properly heaved overboard by the Princess. Under her

direction the cables were cut, and the Draken shoved alongside of the largest Sneken, whose drowsy crew were speedily awoke, and compelled to transfer their cargo of groceries to the hold of the war-barge. Alvilda detected the captain in the act of deserting, with a view to skipping the hard work; so she hanged him to the masthead, and he was a skipper no more. Thus encouraged, the crew fulfilled her request with commendable alacrity, wherefore Alvilda spared them a similar fate. The ship being provisioned and manned, if such a term may be used when all on board were of the other sex, the Princess placed the girls at the oars, and herself taking the helm, shouted "Off!" and they offed. The day had not yet broke, nor even, when it was light, did the young ladies at their work find it so. But they saw Alvilda at the helm, and her stern appearance awed them, and so they oared the boat silently. This condition of things continued for some hours, and they performed in concert without any interval for refreshment; then a maiden in the bow meekly asked if they were to be

allowed beer. Alvilda reprimanded the young party, and solemnly warned them against the vice of grumbling, pointing her moral, and at the same time her finger, at the defunct skipper. He still fluttered in the breeze from the masthead, like an ensign, only that he would have looked more like an ensign had he been less unmistakably a sea-captain. To beguile the tedious hours and cheer her crew, she chanted in a low monotonous dirge-like tone the Scandinavian mutiny-act, which was bloody, to say the best of it. It inspired the listeners, however, and stimulated them in a surprising manner. They had lost sight of land, and were going straight ahead, with that implicit confidence in the course leading somewhere which was characteristic of the Gothic navigators. About midday a breeze sprang up, and the water became too lumpy for rowing; then Alvilda had a sail hoisted and commanded the mess to be prepared. And the mess was of the messiest description. Alvilda did not desert the helm, but she dined herself upon junk and sea-biscuit. She loved such

food, for it was tough and hard and difficult to masticate. If it were unwholesome, so much the better; in her quarrelsome mood it would be pleasant even to have her food disagree with her. The midday sun blazed down upon her, and she swathed the skins about her and defied Thor. At night the waves beat high, and the cutting east wind drove the sleet and hail before it, as the mower is preceded by the whetted scythe; then she bared her bosom, put her thumb to her nose (but this we can hardly believe), and defied Hymir. The girls continued obedient—holystoning the decks when there was wind enough for a sail, or, when there was not, sitting down to their oars without a breeze. The dead captain still hung on, like a humble dependent, and promoted a general cheerfulness and gaiety. They sailed for a long time without meeting anything; then their fresh-water ran short, and they sailed for a long time without drinking anything. Then there was no more junk, and the last ha'porth of peas-pudding was no more. The crew cast devouring glances at the ex-

captain: they all had a hungry look. One day, the same misguided female who had made the inquiry relative to the allowance of beer ventured to observe that, in her opinion, the gentleman at the masthead was sufficiently hung for all culinary purposes, and the most epicurean of palates. She was a bold beauty, and her fighting weight was sixteen stone. Alvilda dropped her into the hold. The following morning they found themselves in straits of a different kind; for there was land on each side. Inshore they discovered a Draken larger than their own, which they boarded without opposition; for none of the crew was at home, so to speak. So the food Alvilda was fully prepared to take by force, she was compelled to appropriate without a blow. When there was neither any more to eat nor to drink, they swam to the shore. Walking inland, they discovered a band of wild and savage-looking men standing around a corpse and weeping, which greatly disgusted the Princess. "Who and what are ye?" she asked in a voice suitable to the nautical drama. "Pirates,"

responded the spokesman of the band, who really appeared to have more of the knave than the spoke in him. "Say rather swabs or lubbers, thou degenerate offspring of a marine victual-dresser!" said Alvilda, her lip curling in ill-concealed contempt. "Swabs, if you please," said the degenerate offspring; "lubbers we ain't, but as stout tars as ever shivered their timbers; and here we be a paying Nature's tribute to our respected captain, whom rheumatics has carried off at last. What, ho! my jolly messmates, heave another sigh, and pay out another tear. Hands off and stand by," he parenthetically added, addressing Alvilda, and gently hauling her off as she was examining the dead man's jack-knife. The consequences of this act he had reason in after-life to deplore; for his sweetheart refused to have any further connection with a man destitute of front teeth. Struck with her pleasing manners no less than by her mighty hand, the pirates, in an engaging way, begged her henceforth to be their captain and leader of the band. Upon her consenting, they

brought from an adjacent cavern abundant provisions, with which they closed the proceedings in becoming joyousness. From that day they became the terror of the seas, but more so of those ill-fated travellers upon it who came in their way. The manner in which their leader provided for these unfortunates is thus tersely described in the saga:—

“Alvilda, resolute and bold,
First boarded them, then lodged them in
the hold.”

The story now goes back to the court of King Saparius. When it was found that the Princess had fled, Olf was inconsolable. In vain her papa, upon whom the loss did not weigh so heavily, assured him that she was well off, and that he, in consequence, was well off to; that it was better for ladies to run away before marriage than after; that in too many respects he would have found her a whopper; declaring her, at the same time, stupid, too clever by half; slow, fast; hasty, sullen; superficial, jötun-heimish, deep; thick-

headed, empty-headed; and, in fact, a jötun altogether. But he did not convince Olf; and got the usual return for kindness such as this. Olf talked to him in a language that is perfectly untranslatable, and returned to his home a misanthropic lover. He called his father a jackass, and, leaving the maternal apron-string, "went-in" for things that astonished the good old lady. He emulated the habits of her he had lost. He took lessons in self-defence, and practised upon his friends. Broken noses became the rage, and were extensively "worn" among the courtiers of King Sigarus. The chattering bevy of court beauties, with whom he erst had beguiled his time, he forsook, and devoted himself to dumbbells. He learnt to swear, and became so proficient in badinage that the hackney-coachmen looked another way, and the bargees were dumb when they met him. His gewgaws were flung aside, and he wore the skin of a wolf he had strangled. His chest expanded, and his limbs were worth ninepence an hour to the artistic Goth. He fought everybody who pretended to equality,

and was much flattered in consequence. The Scalds chanted his praises up and down the public thoroughfares. The bravest of the Norsewomen worked fancy caps for him ; but he put them away with his clean linen, and was apathetic and sad. His big eyes were for ever dreamily looking out to sea, and his soul was filled with yearning love for the only being who did *not* love him. One day he noticed a starved cat lingering on the threshold of a deserted hall ; he leant over it with tears in his eyes, and said, “Thou too lovest and art unloved.” Then he took the cat home, laid it on rugs before the fire, and gave it juicy meat on the appetizing skewer. But in the morning it was gone, and when he went to the forsaken house he found it lying dead in the doorway.

* * * * *

Now many Visigoth merchants told of ships missing ; and one day there came into port a Sneken, whose crew told of their marvellous escape from a swift pirate, which, of their convoy of thirteen, had secured twelve. Then said Olf : “This pirate must be great. Two

suns revolve not round this earth ; two such as I may not live upon it." So he manned a great Draken with Vikings, and made himself their admiral, and went out in search of the pirate. And as the galley bounded over the water, he said, " I will do something worthy of Alvilda ; and when I have done this thing, grant, O Thor, I go to Valhalla !" One night, when all slept but he, an opaque body came between his eyes and the sinking moon. He seized his sword, and shouted to the Vikings. But too late. The deck was already covered with a swarming host of invaders, whose arms glittered in the waning light. He himself, fight how he could, was compelled to retire to the bows of the galley, and set his back against the bulwark. The Vikings were cut down one after another as they came to the hatch.* And now, when they were all slain, the conquerors' swords were turned to Olf. When the moon had sunk, torches were lit, and burned till the sun appeared. All which time a tumult of shrieks and clattering blades arose

* ' Scratch ' in the saga.

from where Olf, himself unscathed, stood whirling his big sword over the breastwork of his dead enemies. At midday his last antagonist had rolled down to his feet, and for the first time he rested his dripping blade. Then he shouted to his friends; a mocking laugh alone replied. He shouted to his foes, and the same voice replied from the castle upon the after-deck, "There is but one left, and that am I. Long have I watched thy prowess, which hath filled me with admiration. Now I have found him worthy to battle withal. An thou subdue me, I will clean thy sword and be thy slave. To the proof: come on!" Olf leapt over the weltering mound of the conquered, and there in the midst of the reeking deck he faced his foe. The form he beheld was, in its majesty, like Odin. The hand that grasped the sword opposed to his was graceful and beautifully turned; but of his foe's face he saw nothing save the black eyes flashing through the wolf's skin, which was its only protection. He wondered if it were Odin; and he said to himself, "All I regret is that

Alvilda sees me not now." What if his words had been audible! So they fought. Two such foes fight not long. How long takes the oak to grow? How long takes the lightning to blast it? Transfixed with a sword, one fell. It was not Olf. But the wolf's skin fell away from the face of the vanquished: then Olf fell as if he too were pierced, and a mighty shriek came from his breast. And his voice became as low and sweet as a woman's, as he murmured again and again the name of the foe whose hand lay in his and no more was against him. "Alvilda, Alvilda!" he said. For it was she. She looked up in his face and recognised him, as he bent over her there, and a soft smile came upon her beautiful face. But she could not speak. She raised his hand to her lips, and held it there till her last warm breath had formed into dew upon their cold surface.



The Last Jest of Goli.



THE LAST JEST OF EOLF.

[In this somewhat remarkable story several inconsistencies and faults will present themselves to the critical reader, for which I hold myself in nowise responsible. The onus must be transferred to shoulders more capable and deserving of bearing it—those of one Peter of Glastonbury, a reverend gentleman, who has been dead some four or five centuries, and whose indifferent Latin I have translated literally into so-so English.]

LAUGH, hinds, laugh! Your lord has wedded the sweetest maiden under heaven; there is wine enough to swim in withal, and your new

mistress has brought Eolf to you—the fool Eolf, who knows not what heaviness of heart means, who never felt a sorrow, or yearned hopelessly for anything. Be merry and glad, for you are to serve the sweetest, gentlest, kindest, fairest lady that ever breathed. Mind—it is *I* tell you this; I, who have known her all my life. Ay, that's right, laugh. It's my humour to look sixty. I warrant you never saw another young stripling of eighteen with a comical old face like mine. Yet I tell you 'tis true, that I have known the Lady Edith since I was a child no higher than this broken knee of mine. And she has set me a chair beside her at the wedding-feast, and bidden me take off my motley dress and be a fool no more. No, no; you shall laugh at her fool before he lays aside his bells and his bauble. There's music in the bladder. Hark how the peas rattle, like teeth in an empty skull. There's nothing but joy in this house. Ha, ha, ha! Laugh, you dull gaping jolter-heads! There is no care in this world to-day. Fetch me a horse-collar, and I will show you

such faces in it as shall make you laugh 'til your sides ache with laughter. See here : would you think a man with a withered leg could pitch a summersault like that ? Look ! I can hold straws in the furrows of my cheeks so, and walk on my hands thus. Laugh, laugh ! Why do you stare at me as though I were a ghost ? Have you never seen a merry fool before ? Ha, ha, ha ! Laugh as I do ; see how the tears run down my cheeks with gaiety ; hear how mirth chokes my voice. For the love of fun tell me if these wrinkles about my mouth don't betray my merriment ? Bring me a horn of wine, and a good stout rush to lean upon, for I die with laughter. Now will I tell you the merriest jest you ever heard.

Once upon a time a lord and a lady lived in a brave castle on a hill. But the castle was empty, for the noble pair had never a child, and they needed but few servants to minister to their few wants. They loved each other well. Both felt the want of children, but most the lady regretted this childlessness ; for the lord had his horses and his falcons for pets, and

in hunting and hawking with neighbouring lords he passed his days pleasantly ; but whilst he was thus engaged the lady found nothing in her home that she could love, and wandered through the empty rooms of the castle, thinking how sweet it would be to see young faces and children's toys in them, and to hear merry laughter and pleasant voices instead of the echo of her own footfall. She was happy when her husband returned, and never told him of her yearning ; but he, because he loved her, saw that she pined, and knew full well the cause. One night he drew her on his knee, and said :

“ Wife mine, to-morrow is our wedding-day ; what shall I give thee as a token of love ? ”

And the lady kissed him and said :

“ I need no token, dear love, whilst thou art with me. I want nothing that thou canst give.”

“ But thou needst a token when I am away ; and, indeed, I fear that hound and hawk take me too much from thee. I will bring thee to-morrow a fair child, and thou shall rear it as

though it were thine own. It will be a comfort to thee, ay and to me too when I grow too old to be anything but a good stay-at-home. Tell me, . . . it shall be—a little maid or a little man—for I can give thee choice of either, and both are equally fair.”

Rather to please her husband than herself—for she had little faith in a strange child filling the place in her heart that was vacant for one that should be truly her own—she accepted the proposed gift, and said she would have the child a little maid. So the very next morning Sir Edmund rode away to fulfil his promise and fetch his wife her love token.

Now I shall make you laugh. A league from the castle were two huts in a wood. In one lived Gib, who kept the lord’s horses, and in the other Balder, who managed the hawks. Now the reason they lived so far from the castle was this: Balder’s wife gave birth to a daughter every winter, and Gib’s wife gave birth to a son every summer. Each child was gifted with healthy lungs, and was six months before it tired of exercising them; so that a

continual wailing and gnashing of gums arose from the one or the other of the fruitful servants' homes. It was pleasing to the lord when he first married; for he said—"himself, "Ah, presently there shall be such a yelling in *my* nursery as shall outshriek all this;" but when a year passed and no whimper was heard in the castle, the sound became hateful to him, and he bade Balder and Gib build themselves dwellings where their progenies' shrieks might be unheard of man. He advised them to go into the wood, because of the wolves; "for there," he said, "if the children don't frighten the wolves away—as I suspect they will—the wolves will eat them; so any way this removal to the woods will benefit mankind."

The lord's anticipations were correct; the wolves disappeared from the woods. The children of these two henchmen, as soon as they were of an age to do anything beyond frightening wolves, associated together. Balder's daughters played the whole day long with Gib's sons. The two youngest, tied to one post, sucked one crust, and developed their

strength in scatheless combats, whilst the two eldest wandered through woods and over heaths hunting for birds' nests and berries and flowers. The girl was now eight years old; her name was Edith, and her companion's name was Eolf—ah! that Eolf was not ugly and broken as I am, but a bright, shining-haired youngster, with a skin of milk and teeth of pearl. These two children were all in all to each other, and were never separate. They were seldom at home. The hut contained few charms for them, and their mothers had sufficient children to love and cherish and thrash without them, and indeed were well content to give them their share of food and let them take it to eat where they liked. Better than the rangers they knew the woods and what they contained. They made the acquaintance of a field-mouse, and cultivated a friendship with the interesting family contained in her nest; and Edith took upon herself the duties of maternity to some orphan magpies whose mother Eolf had incontinently slain. They had a castle in the roomy branches of a tree that was easy of

ascent to Edith—a sanctuary whither they could fly when anything like the howl of a wolf fell upon their ears. They had a bower where they spent hours when the sun was high and hot, and a palace under a rock where they could laugh at rain, and shelter themselves from wind. These possessions were extensively ornamented with the eggs and feathers of birds, fir cocoons, and flowers. The eggs and feathers Eolf procured, whilst Edith collected the flowers; and when she had arranged them, they would both sit and admire the effect. It was of these two children that Sir Edmund offered his wife the choice.

One morning early, as the children were sleeping side by side in Balder's hut, Sir Edmund rode up to the door, and Balder, who knew for what he came, bade Gib hold his boy whilst he loosened Edith from his arms. For Sir Edmund wished that the child should be his entirely, and that she should have no communication with her old associates, insisting that anything which might remind her of the wild existence, and cause her to regret the

change, should scrupulously be kept from her. Gib, knowing his boy's disposition, saw that it was necessary he should not know whither his companion was taken, and so for an hour after Edith was carried away he held the boy. In truth, Eolf taxed his father's strength and temper; for finding himself restrained and Edith gone, he writhed, kicked, bit, and struggled with amazing pertinacity and vigour. Meanwhile Edith was set in front of Sir Edmund and borne away to the castle, never more to return to her playmate or the woods. Soon, soon she must have overcome her grief in losing them, for how much more had she gained in their place! Her heart was too tender and loving to retain a single affection, shutting out all others. So that she have love, a child's heart does not ache. What had she to regret? What memory of the past could rival the joys of her new life? Frequently the two had hungered when food was scarce at home, and found their rags an insufficient protection from the north wind; now she had the costliest garments, and every desire was

gratified. Between her and the gentle wife of Sir Edmund grew a love more full and tender than that she felt for Eolf. For though the boy would have given his life to please her, he could never have gained her whole heart. There is a love possessed only by a good and loving woman whose delicate softness inspires a devotion in children as none other can. This it was that linked Edith to her foster-mother ; and but for this, like a bud that is concealed from the light, the more beautiful phase of her nature might never have been known. And she was happy ; and there was indeed now laughter and prattle in the castle. But it was otherwise with Eolf. There was none to fill the place in his heart that Edith had possessed. At home he was regarded as an unnecessary nuisance and a misfortune. Circumstances fostered the feeling of exclusive affection which had been growing in his heart, and he felt less than ever able or desirous of associating with the younger children. When Gib, in consequence of receiving a blinding kick in the eye from the struggling urchin, permitted him to

escape, and indeed expedited his departure by propulsion with his own foot, Eolf ran to the familiar resorts in the woods where Edith would be likely to fly if she followed a course with reference to her captor similar to his own. He slept in the wood; and before the sun he rose, and continued his search. At night he went home for food. But all the day he wandered through brake and brier, in vain endeavouring to find his lost Edith. He would climb hills that tried the strength of men, his little heart filled with the hope that from the crest he should see some trace of her. Then he would look around over the desolate valleys and call her name, and listen long for the answer that never came. He penetrated the scrub of tangled forests, and there, in the stillness which mayhap had never before been broken by a human voice, he cried, "Edith, Edith!" until his piping voice broke with the grief of his heart. He would despair, and sit down in the midst of a wide heath crying and sobbing until a kind of desperation possessed him, when he would jump up, and run along

hopelessly, frightening the timid rabbits to their burrows with his blubbering. The exercise preserved his health from the effects of this unnatural sorrow ; yet maybe his mind became affected, and his love was but a madness.

One day Eolf's mother said to Gib, "Eolf eats and grows, but does nothing but hunt and rave after Balder's child." Gib kept awake until Eolf wandered in at night, and said to him, "To-morrow, Eolf, go thou to the woods, and bring in dead boughs, and pile them against the hut right up to the eaves." When Gib returned from work the next night and found no wood piled he was vexed, and again sat up yawning. Gib loved to sleep after his work, and remaining awake annoyed him even more than Eolf's disobedience ; so when the child came into the hut, Gib seized him by the hair and beat him, and told him he should fare worse, if the next night a stack of wood was not found.

But he never touched his son again ; for when Eolf was free he went out of the door,

and no more passed in. From that time he lived totally in the woods and was a savage. He understood how to make fire, and grew cunning in the trapping of bird and beast for food. When winter came he made fagots, and drew them before his cavern, burying himself in moss and leaves and fur and feathers. He became brown with exposure to the weather; and his fair hair, all tangled and ragged, descended about his shoulders. As years passed and he grew, his aspect became still more strange and formidable, so that he was regarded with fear and dread throughout all that country. In the most diverse places and times he would suddenly appear and scare travellers by rushing to them, staring in their faces, and as suddenly disappear with a wild cry of despair. If, seeing him at a distance, they spurred on their horses to avoid him, he would pursue, and when he found it impossible to overtake them he would stretch his arms towards them, crying in a piteous tone of supplication, "Edith, Edith!" He was never heard to say any word but this, and it was

believed he could speak none other. When Sir Edmund heard of this and found that it was Gib's son, he ordered that the lad should be captured, and treated kindly, yet with restraint whilst his madness lasted. Also he took such precaution that Edith never heard a word that should make her remember with sorrow the playmate of her childhood. But it was found impossible to catch Eolf; his cunning and agility defeated the greatest efforts of those sent to capture him; indeed these efforts were not very great, for the poor rascals, filled with superstitious dread of the "wild man," were well content when he ran away from them. His strange appearance added greatly to the terror his habits inspired. With the skins of rabbits and squirrels he had contrived a covering for his body which protected him effectually from the rain and frost, but gave him a terrible likeness to the beast and fiend he was by most supposed to be. And, but that he worshipped a being of infinite grace and sweetness instead of a thing of evil, he was a fiend. There was no love or feeling in

him but for one. The changing seasons, the flowers, the starry heavens, the song of birds, never stirred a fibre of his heart. What were the golden valleys, what the purple hills and the silver rivulets to him? In the valleys he found not Edith, from the hills he could see but the desolate empty world, in the water he saw but the reflection of his own sad weird face. All, all was barren, cold, dead, lifelessness to him.

And now, Edith was grown tall and womanly, and her heart was old enough to choose out of the whole world one being for its devotion. And she loved Brown Harold. But deep and fond and pure as was her love, it was not exclusive; *she* was not mad. Everything of beauty appealed to her gentler nature. Every phase of life excited her sympathy. The love for her adoptive mother, whose gentleness and sweet simplicity she shared, was not diminished because she loved Brown Harold more. Many a wooer had she; for the fame of her beauty and amiability spread all over the land. But for his utter seclusion Eolf would have heard

of her he so vainly sought. Even the king's son sued for her hand, but she gave it to Brown Harold, the poorest of her lovers, and so made him the richest. Neither Sir Edmund nor his lady was quite pleased with her election; they would have had her marry a prince; but when they found how truly these two loved each other, they refrained from saying or doing anything which might cloud Edith's happiness, and with a somewhat rueful joy the noble foster-parents betrothed them and beheld their gladness.

I tell you what, my fellow fools, we have reason to be thankful our senses are no better than they are. It would have banished the smile from sweet Edith's cheek, as she listened to her lover singing beneath her window, to have seen afar off a mad savage standing up to his knees in the wet ferns upon the waste, looking round about in the moonlight to see if she were there, and to have heard the poor wretch crying from his lonely miserable heart, "Edith, Edith!"

One night when Eolf crawled from his

burrow he smelt smoke, and beheld a tongue of flame flickering in the distance. He walked towards it; it increased, and the smoke grew lurid. He passed the confines of a park, and presently found before him a blazing castle. The castle was ancient, and unlike the castles we build now. It had no bayle and no outer work, save the fosse and barbican. At each corner stood a tower five stories high, and each was clothed in green ivy. The fosse, filled by a natural spring, was broad and deep; yet of what avail was the water that flowed around the blazing pile? Except one of the four towers the whole building was in flames. A group of deeply engrossed people stood before Eolf. They were not looking at the castle, but at Sir Edmund, who was kneeling over a charred body.

“It is his wife,” said one.

“No,” replied another; “it is the Lady Edith.”

“Edith!” shouted Eolf, bursting through the crowd.

“No, no,” cried Brown Harold, who, too,

was beside the body ; “ it is not she. Edith is still in the castle ! ” and he sprang to his feet, and rushing to the barbican would have plunged into the fire, but that hands restrained him. At that instant a piercing shriek issued from the uppermost casement of the tower which yet remained untouched by the fire, whilst for the time a figure was seen standing there. Then it disappeared, and after the scream with which the crowd beneath had echoed that from above, only the roaring of flames, the crackling of timbers, and the hiss of embers falling in the moat were heard. The voice was still. Probably she—either the wife or child of Sir Edmund—was suffocated by the smoke now issuing freely from the casement. All were silent in presence of the tragedy taking place within two hundred feet of them, but which they were powerless to prevent. The fosse was twenty yards broad and the lowest aperture in the tower twenty feet above the water’s edge. The means of access by the drawbridge and through the hall was impracticable ; a furnace forty yards

through must be penetrated to reach it. For now the fire was eating into the lower chamber of the tower, and through the arrow-slits the smoke spurted out. Presently another rending scream from the tower was heard, and the figure was seen standing on the crenelated top.

Then answered Eolf: "Edith, I come!"

He plunged into the moat, and from the grassy slope sprang upwards, like a cat, upon the ivy-covered face of the tower. He was light and swift in his movements, using tooth and nail and every muscle in his body as he clambered upwards. I tell you that by the ivy alone he clomb the twenty feet between earth and the casement. Laugh if you will, you heavy dullards. Say it's impossible, and I'll swear that you're right. You couldn't do it with your half hearts—the lightest amongst you couldn't; but I tell you if a man has in him the determination to succeed, he may do things more incredible than this. Eolf reached the aperture; that I know. Through it the smoke rushed, all charged with sparks, and within was a red glow. The means of communication

between the chambers was by hatches in the floors and ladders between. When Eolf entered the chamber he could see the chinks in the floor by the fire beneath, and through the opening from the lower chamber a flame was shooting upwards to the one above and licking the ladder. Through that flame and up the crackling ladder he must go. Closing his eyes against the stinging smoke, he rushed forward. His foot struck something; and he stumbled and fell upon the very edge of the hatch. It was the door of the hatch against which he stumbled, and the door closing with his fall shut down the flame. He sprang up the ladder and found his way from chamber to chamber instinctively, until presently he beheld the glowing sky through the last remaining opening above him. And then he stood upon the leaded roof.

Cowering in a corner, appalled and stupefied by the fate which seemed inevitable, was Edith—Edith no longer a child, yet still Edith. *He* knew it was she. Had he been blind he should have known that. Ay,

though a swallow be forsaken and left to perish in solitude, it will find its way to the South, and think you it knows not when it has reached the goal? Altered! How can the thing we worship alter beyond our knowledge? Ye who find your God in the oak, know ye Him not in the lightning that strikes it to the earth? What had this Eolf pictured his Edith but a being of infinite grace and beauty? and there in the corner lay that being of infinite grace and beauty. He threw himself beside her and buried his face in her bosom, murmuring her name again and again. Until she heard his voice and felt his head upon her breast, Edith knew not that help was at hand. At once it aroused her from her dull apathy; but to what knowledge? Did *she* recognise Eolf? Did she know who had braved fire and death for her? A cry of joy came from her lips, and she threw her arms about the panting boy's neck, and for one instant in his life Eolf felt rapture.

But hearken, ye who love a good joke and can laugh at the agony of fools, hearken to

this excellent quip : as her head dropped fainting upon the madman's neck, she said, "Harold—my Harold !" Eolf was dull at reading riddles then. His dull wit was not capable of finding the point of this excellent joke for a while ; and as he held his beloved in his arms a vague wonder filled his mind, that he should be called Harold who believed his name to be Eolf. But the recollection of him they called Harold, who had attempted to rush into the burning hall came upon him, and with it a dim perception of the fact which in all his thoughts of her had never entered his imagination. Cannot you imagine what a comical frenzy filled the wretch's heart as he said to himself, "She knows me not, she loves me not ! Another is to her what she is to me, and I—I alone am forgotten" ? He rose to his feet and took her up in his arms, and with a strength we sane ones know not, he leapt on the parapet of the tower, and held her before him in the full light of the fire below. He looked at this creature, for whom every action of his body, every thought of his

mind, had been spent. She was still Edith, so fair, so beautiful, yet not his—his Edith no more. What symbol was there for him in the pale cold shadow of death that invested the worshipped being in his arms? Had he found her but to know that he had more surely lost her? For ever she was dead to him. Dead, dead! Yet now she lay against his breast as she had lain before—this was happiness! Why should he not so die, and feel no more the pangs of consciousness! He looked down into the pit of flame. He had but to incline his body a few inches, and who should separate him from his beloved? No more vain yearning and despairing lonely unlovedness. Why should he not forget her one word, “Harold,” and in the utter happiness of union perish?

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Ha, ha, ha! Ho, ho, ho! This fellow was born a fool, and educated himself into a madman, as I have shown, and the result of both was he could not forget when he wished. When he turned his eyes from the tempting flames below to the face of the girl in his

arms, it seemed to him as if she was but sleeping there a child, as she had slept on that last night when they had taken her from him; and upon his memory came the words she whispered before she closed her eyes: "Eolf, wilt thou make me a daisy-chain to-morrow?" and how, when he had answered her "Yes," she had kissed him and said it would make her happy. His heart was touched; his strength failed him; he tottered on the wall. And then he regained his strength as he kissed her for the last time in his life, and said, "I will make thy chain."

A few moments in this man's lifetime comprised more emotions and perils than happen to another in sixty years. Five minutes had not elapsed from the time of entering the tower by the casement to the time he re-entered it by the upper hatch. But in that five minutes the fire had been eating its way upwards, and flames now curled through the casement by which he had entered, and the beams in the roof of that chamber were splitting and spluttering in the heat. Eolf had no

plan of escape ; all that entered his mind was that he would. And to descend as he had ascended was the means he at once essayed. His eager haste had made him omit to close the succeeding traps after him as he ascended, and the flames having overcome the first, there was no impediment to the smoke, which now belched up through the hole he must descend by. Into this cloud, and down the ladder into the first chamber, he slid and scrambled, careful only that Edith should suffer no contusion. The necessity for air forced him to the casement. A brisk wind swept the face of the tower and enabled him to gasp a few mouthfuls of air. Again he rushed into the smoke and descended. The current of smoke scorched his face as he entered the second apartment. He thought of Edith, and as he stood at the casement he tore the still saturated furs from his body and wrapped them about the girl. He lifted her upon his shoulder, and once more groped to the hatch and got his feet upon the sloping ladder. Halfway down he stopped. The heat was fearful. He opened his eyes. The

lower part of the ladder was burning ; jets of fire were flickering from the floor, and a shaft of flame and sparks rising through the trap. It was impossible to descend there. He began to reascend. The ladder crumbled and slipped sideways ; still he clung to it, and with the next step put his hand upon the edge of the hole above. The ladder crumbled again, and with his weight slipped entirely from under him, falling and throwing up a thousand embers. Eolf hung for a moment by one hand—for one moment—and fell. Then in some way, though how God who guided him only knows, he got to the casement with Edith, thrust himself through, and holding her against his breast, flung himself back downwards into the moat, and in that position by a mercy he fell into the water, so that Edith was saved. The water split open Eolf's naked back, as neatly as a flesher runs his whittle down a hart's back ; that was a fine thing to bring him back to life and make him forget his burns ! Not until they dragged him from the water,

with her he still held in his arms, did consciousness kindly consent to leave him.

O you clowns! you don't deserve a fool. You can't appreciate a funny story unless it be seasoned with fire and blood. But I'll make you laugh for fun's sake before I've done. Bring me a horn.

This is what the chatterbox told Eolf, as he lay on his litter, and when his senses, after some weeks' absence, returned to him:—When the Lady Edith recovered from her shock, which was speedily—for she was a strong and healthy girl—she suffered one still greater. She heard that her gentle foster-mother was burned and dead. Then Sir Edmund bade her prepare for a yet greater ordeal, and told her that Brown Harold was no more.

“No! oh no; it cannot be!” cried Edith. “He saved me! Had he perished, I must have perished too.”

“*He* saved thee?” said Sir Edmund.

“Yes, yes. I held him in these arms upon the tower top and in the moat.”

Then Sir Edmund buried his face in his hands

for some moments in thought or grief, and when he raised it, he said :

“For all that, he perished by the fire. The injuries he sustained then have been fatal since.”

For some time Edith was inconsolable ; but one day Sir Edmund drew her to him, and said :

“I too have lost. Be thou my comfort, and let thy father’s love in part fill the place of that which is no more.”

Then she took his hand, and pressing it she said :

“We will both struggle to forget, my father.”

Eolf had time for reflection as he lay recovering from his burns and bruises. He wondered how Harold had met his death, and why Sir Edmund encouraged Edith’s belief that he had saved her, concealing the truth. Was it that the proud knight feared the love for her poor playmate might return, knowing him to have saved her, as in sooth she might now that Harold was dead ? He conceived high hopes, and believed himself less injured by the fire and fall than by his lord’s injustice.

Sir Edmund came to the bedside of the wild man, the madman, the beast, and said :

“I would repay thee, if it is possible, for what thou hast done. Tell me what can I give thee.”

Eolf answered : “Edith.”

Sir Edmund frowned, but the good woman who nursed Eolf took him aside, and whispered to him that Eolf was mad ; then the anger vanished from the knight’s brow, and compassion was there as he said :

“Yes, yes, my poor boy, you shall have Edith ; you shall live with us in the fine new castle I am building, and be ever beside her.”

Eolf snatched his hand and pressed it to his lips and sank back exhausted, for he was still weak. But with the prospect of being near his beloved Edith once more, he rapidly recovered strength ; so that in a few weeks he was suffered to walk in the sunshine alone. Sir Edmund’s considerate care had provided for him brave clothes, such as never before he had worn. No single garment of thonged skins, but hose, and a jerkin likewise. As he

stepped into the sun in those fine things the wildest dreams filled his imagination. Brown Harold was dead and Edith forgetting him; might not her old love for the companion of her childhood return? In his new clothes, and with his light hair kempt, might he not look, when health returned to him, handsome even as Brown Harold? Might they not love each other as of old, nay, with a love grown deeper and stronger with the years that had passed? He saw a man leading a gaily caparisoned horse, and him he followed until horse and servant stood upon a grassy slope before the house wherein Sir Edmund lived whilst his new castle was a-building. Eolf waited trembling; perhaps this was her steed, and now he should see her. In one supposition he was right, for presently from the door there came the knight, all prepared for riding, and upon his arm clung Edith. For one moment Eolf could not move; the next he ran forward and called her name. He was close upon her before she was conscious of his presence, but when turning she saw him, she screamed and clung tight to her adoptive

father, as if for protection. The knight twisted himself between them, raising his hand; but he had no need to strike, Eolf had received his blow. Edith feared him, and shrunk away as if he had been a viper. Eolf cowered on the turf as though he had been whipped into subjection like a hound. The knight dropped his hand, and taking Eolf kindly by the shoulder, said :

“ This is the poor boy I told you about ; he is perfectly harmless and good.”

Edith looked up at him with tears of pity in her eyes, and boldly took Eolf’s hand in hers as she said :

“ I am weak and easily frightened. Thou must not startle me again. I want one to protect me, and give me courage. Thou shalt stop with me whilst my father is away, and amuse me—wilt thou ? ”

For nine years Eolf had not used his tongue but for the utterance of one word, and now he could find no expression for the thoughts in his soul. The muscles of his face moved, and Sir Edmund burst into laughter loud and long ;

and when Eolf looked at him in astonishment, he laughed again.

“He has the drollest face I ever beheld,” said the knight. “He’s a born fool. This very day I will get a set of bells for him, and he shall be my zany henceforth.”

Eolf was stupefied and bewildered. He could understand nothing then ! Why did his face move one with terror and another with mirth ? Why was he threatened, pitied and compassionated like a miserable dog ? It was not until he had seen his face in a brook that he knew how frightful he was ; with what comic lines and dimples those burning embers and blazing beams had covered his face. He was frightened of himself, and shrunk from the reflection ; then, as he ventured again to look, and saw the expression of his face, he laughed—laughed for the first time—laughed ten times louder and longer than the knight. I tell you it makes one laugh to find for the first time in your life that you are a fool instead of a man ; that God has put you here for man to laugh at and woman to pity ; to know that

you are fit for nothing amongst men but to wear bells.

Something else made Eolf laugh before long. He found out that he was just coming to his senses, and that he had been stark-mad all his life. When he made faces and beat people with his bauble, and shouted and laughed, folks said : “ ’Tis pleasant to see what kind treatment can do. Here art thou, who wast as mad as a dog, getting quite sensible and like other human beings. If thou couldst only get that idea out of thy head that thou savedst the Lady Edith, thou wouldst be all right ! ”

Yes, indeed, this Eolf was coming to his senses. All day long he sang and capered and laughed, making the whole house merry with his antics. Even the Lady Edith smiled at some of his tricks, and this pleased the knight greatly. But he pleased her in other ways, for he would be absent for hours, and return with such flowers from wood and heath as she most loved. She used to say how curious it was that he should know what flowers she liked. He watched her face and seemed to

divine her thoughts, and with his utmost tenderness regarded them, doing nothing which might not harmonise with them and everything that could soothe her or give her pleasure. One day she said to him :

“Eolf, I know not how I could live without thee.”

But when she gave him at night her hand to kiss, it was as the mistress gives her hand to a slave, and he knew how much, how little, her words implied. She, too, was delighted to think he was recovering from his madness, and once or twice put him to trial. She spoke of Brown Harold, of his bravery in rescuing her, and of his death, and Eolf said, “Brown Harold was brave,” and never contradicted her or tried to put her right. Why should he? Would anything transfer to him, an ugly fool, the love she held for one handsomer than he had ever been? Would she love him more, if she loved Harold less? But sometimes when Edith sat alone, pensive and sad, when the knight was away and she seemed destitute of a loving heart in whose shelter she could forget

her great sorrow, Eolf, watching her, felt his heart beat high, and the yearning came upon him to snatch her into his arms and to say, "Edith, my heart's love, I am the Eolf who was thy first love, with whom thou wanderedst years ago. I am Eolf, who for thee lost my manliness and beauty and strength and health and reason. Tell me of thy trouble, and let me comfort thee as my heart prompts." But the first movement of his body set the bells a-tinkling, and he said to himself, "No, I am a born fool, and must live and die accursed."

The Knight was selfish, as men are, and seeing Edith on his return in the evening with the cheerful smile she assumed to give him pleasure, he was quite content, and ate and drank and hunted as of old. He saw not that Edith's cheek was pale and thin, and knew not how for long hours she brooded over her love for Brown Harold. But the fool did; and frequently his face, as he looked at Sir Edmund, wore a look that was not comie. For his mind was impressed with a strange idea. He fancied that Harold was not dead, or if dead murdered

by Sir Edmund. He reasoned thus :—Sir Edmund is selfish and loves his daughter as he loved his wife selfishly, and wishing to keep her by him to lessen his solitude has put away Brown Harold who would have taken her to himself.

One day the fool found Edith with a curl of brown hair in her lap and her face buried in her hands. Eolf would have crept away unseen but for his cursed bells. Edith raised her head and beckoned to him. He knelt beside her.

“Thou must not tell my kind father that I am so foolish ; but Oh, Eolf, I did love Harold so.”

As Sir Edmund slept that night there came one in the dark and knelt upon his throat, and the point of a knife pricked the flesh of his breast. Hot breath was on his face, and these words were whispered in his ear :

“Where is Brown Harold ?”

“You are choking me,” he answered.

“Where is he ?”

“Take that knife from my breast.”

“Where is he ?”

“ I cannot breathe.”

“ Where is he ? ”

“ Burned.”

“ Where is he, liar ? ”

“ Dead.”

“ Then die thou too ! ”

“ Wait.”

“ Where is he ? ”

“ Under the care of my brother in Kent.”

“ Rupert ?—Now if thou liest thou diest.”

“ Rupert.”

“ Give me thy ring. So ! Now, move but an inch, and thou diest.”

The knee was removed from the knight's throat, and presently the knife from his breast ; but when he moved the point returned. So he lay back, and during the night no sound told him that he was not still threatened. He prayed for daylight, and when it came and showed him no foe, he sprang from his bed and summoned his household. Eolf was missing. Whilst his men armed themselves at his direction, and one went for horses, he questioned, but could learn nothing to prove that his night

attacker was Eolf. Only Edith had heard him. He had whispered into her chamber, "I go to complete thy daisy-chain." More she knew not.

"Where is my horse?—quick!" cried Sir Edmund.

"Sire," replied the trembling attendant who had been sent to bring the animal, "the stables are empty."

On the knight's mare Eolf sped noiselessly over the green grass, taking no course save that which the horse chose, and which seemed to tend away from the starting-point. When the morning came he saw a cowherd, and to him he rode up and asked in which direction lay Kent. The herdsman looked at the mare all speckled with flecks of foam, and then at the fool in his motley, and asked,

"Whom dost thou seek?"

"That matter doesn't concern thee. Tell me how I may get to Kent."

The herdsman patted the mare's neck, and coming beside Eolf said:

"Oh! you can keep your secret if you like,

and I can keep mine ; and so we may both part."

"It is no secret ; I do but seek my brother, who is a falconer there."

"Well I have no secret neither, for I know not the way to Kent ; but my father who cuts wood on the hill knows. We will ask him."

The two ascended the slope ; Eolf not without fear that his guide was dishonest, and his companion with somewhat similar apprehensions regarding him. He kept close to Eolf's side, and said little until they were within sound of the axe, and at the outskirt of the wood ; then he said :

"My father is cutting wood for our master the baron, who lives in the castle up there."

Eolf pulled his horse's rein.

"I pay no mail to your master," he said, and digging his heels into the mare's side he jerked her round, and in another moment would have been half down the hill, but that the cow-herd had slipped his knife under the saddle-girth. A moment sufficed for the mare to slip the rider from her loins, and Eolf found himself on

his back with the herdsman upon him, holding him by the throat, and shouting for help. When Eolf was secure between four or five lusty woodmen, the herdsman laughed and said:

“The mare will get home safe; she knows the road between this and Sir Edmund’s well enough I trow. Why, thou fool, that mare was our young master’s, and before he gave it to the knight, he rode day after day upon it to see his lady-love, the knight’s daughter. Thou wilt be hanged for this jest, my fine fellow.”

But hanged he was not; for Brown Harold’s kinsmen, when they heard all Eolf had to tell, fed him, gave him wine, covered his motley with a hauberk, and his striped legs with greaves, put a mace in his hand for a bauble, and set him on a brave horse. Then Brown Harold’s brothers arrayed themselves in proof, and placing the fool amongst them rode into Kent; but night fell upon them before they had arrived at their journey’s end; and as they could find neither their road nor one to guide them to it, they tethered their horses and made a fire on a hill’s side. They

set pickets, and of these Eolf was one. He knew every sound of the night, and his ear and eye had long sought in the dark. He was the first who heard the jingling of arms and caparisons far down below in the hollow. But before he gave the alarm he hurried down the hill until he found himself in the road they had lost. He listened. The jingling became more distinct. Like a hind he ran forward along the road, and finding it wound upwards, he kept along its course until he beheld on one side the glimmer of the fire. When his friends heard his tidings they broke green boughs from the trees, and gathered brake, which was wet with dew and threw them on the fire. Then they mounted their horses and followed Eolf, who led them into the road; and there they halted. As yet none but Eolf could hear a sound, and some were inclined to mistrust him. But he bade them follow him, and post themselves where they might lie in ambush, and attack with advantage the party, if it proved to be of their foes. So they ascended the hill still farther,

until they came to a part where Eolf, who was on foot, bade them advance with care. Ethelbert, the brother of Harold, said if the place were dangerous for them, they might make it still more perilous for others. So he got from his horse, and others with him, and they examined the spot carefully. The road was cut in the chalk-hill; on one side was nothing but a few bushes between it and the precipitous hill-side; on the other a fir-wood ascended. Then Ethelbert ordered his little troop in this wise: six stout men he made to lie down in the fern by the roadside, and under the firs, with their drawn swords beside them and their crossbow bolts upon the spring. The horses of these were tied up in the wood. Two skilled horsemen he posted so that they might attack the troop in their rear, and another with himself stationed themselves upon the road above the footmen. Eolf was allowed to fight as he pleased, so that he came not between the horsemen. These arrangements were made so well and speedily, that the rattle of the accoutrements were but just audible

when Ethelbert took his position. Then they waited, listening to the approaching party, each man shivering with excitement and hopeful that those who approached were foes, and would fight. Presently Eolf brought word that the party numbered twelve, and shortly after an owl hooted. That was the signal that the party had past the foremost men. The advancing horsemen were laughing and jesting, but when they heard the owl they were silent. Then from the darkness in front spake Ethelbert :

“ Who are ye who travel armed by night ? ”

“ Who are ye who question us ? ”

“ Such as will have an answer. Speak ! ”

“ I am your master if, as I think by your voice, you are Ethelbert of Tretton.”

“ I am Ethelbert of Tretton, and God shall decide which of us is master if you are no better than Sir Edmund of Merewood.

“ I am Edmund of Merewood.”

There was an audible murmur of satisfaction under the firs.

“ Then defend yourself, accursed villain ! ”

“Truce! We are ambushed. Give us fair fight, or take my wager.”

“We are eleven to twelve; think you I will trust the honour of Brown Harold’s gaoler. In the name of God, at them, men of mine!” Then the cross-bowmen yelled and the strings of their bows sang, and the bolt crashed through helm and corslet. The horses durst not move for the dread of the hill-side and of the clattering steel before and behind them, but reared and plunged in answer to the spur; and the horsemen, knowing not but that the foes were amongst them, were bewildered. The foremost succeeded in charging forwards; but the whirling ball of Ethelbert’s mace struck the head of Sir Edmund’s horse and felled him, and he who rode beside him was turned from his course and leaped down the hill. And the footmen, grasping their swords in both hands, clove at the horsemen; whilst they, not knowing friend from foe, struck madly about them, goading their horses with their spurs and striking them with the butts of their swords;

then the harassed beasts turned this way and that, and sprang forward like mad things, some of them falling on swords, and others leaping down the declivity, but few passed scatheless from the battle-place.

Ha, ha, ha! That's woke you up, has it, you blood-and-thunder-loving scullions? You want to know how many were killed, why Sir Edmund was spared, and how they wrested Brown Harold from Rupert. Ah! well; ask Siewald at the door there; he fought in the fight, and knows; but I shall tell no more—that's my humour. But Eolf took a lover to his own love—there's a jest for you!—and what did he get for his pains? Did she notice crooked, maimed, burned Eolf, whilst beautiful Brown Harold held her in his arms? Did he feel that happiness which attends all doing of good? Why, don't I laugh—ha, ha!—till I cry with my laughter? and can any one laugh who isn't happy? I'm to take off my servant's livery—these merry bells and all—and I'm to live well, and die fat. For I've brought your master home from captivity, and

restored him to the loveliest, sweetest, gentlest lady that lives.

And now that she is happy, what need has she of a fool? What need has the sweet bird that skims over the golden cloud of the beast that crawls wearily under its black shadow? Hark, hark! They are toasting the bride, and that rippling music is her laugh. Listen, listen! The sweet bird sings.

Then Eolf threw himself upon his bauble, and the bladder burst with a snap. He raised himself, and with a laugh almost like an echo of his burst rattle, he said: "That was my heart that snapped; and so ends this merry, merry jest." And dropping his head upon the floor, the fool died.



The Melancholy Minstrel.



THE MELANCHOLY MINSTREL.

FYTTE I.

PETER of Fordham was a merry miller. He made no show of riches, especially when called upon by the tax-collector; yet covertly it was said that he made more by grinding corn than he chose to declare.* Despite the high prices of provisions and fuel, there were ever fire and

* This is slyly suggested in a ballad, probably written by Cymon of Fordham, which, after his death, was sung in that part of the country for two centuries, and was finally imprinted as a broadside. There is but one copy extant, and that is sufficiently curious to justify reproduction. Here it is, almost unaltered :

flesh and a flagon for whomsoever chose to accept his hospitality. The dulness of trade never affected his spirits; he carolled from morn till night, working or not. He loved

Peter Hys Pigge.

Or the Mysterie of ye Mill cleared up; showing
how a Swine which was leane became fatte,
&c. A merrie conceit writ to the tune of "Alle
for Love"—licensed.

Peter was poor, ande soe was I.

But my pigge was poorer than bothe;

Ande I said to Peter, "That pigge must die,

But to take hys lyfe I am lothe.

(Syngynge) Middle dum dandy, &c.

For there's never noe flesh on hys wonderful boans,

Ande there's nothyng inside hym worth fryeing;

He deafens me nowe wyth hys piteous groans,

But he'll stun me outryghte when he's dyeing!"

(Syngynge) Middle dum dandy, &c.

Then Peter was moved with compassion for me;

We cried like an infant of two;

"I've nothyng to gibe ye, poor debyl," saide he,

"And I've nothyng, likewise, to gibe you.

(Syngynge) Middle dum dandy, &c.

every one who was worth loving, and was loved in return. Society at Fordham was limited to the customers who brought corn to the mill, and the poor brethren from the neighbouring monastery. They were frequent visitors. Warming their poor naked toes and dozing in the chimney-corner, they felt a satisfaction with themselves and mankind that no mortification of the flesh could produce. They were simple kindly men, with no harm in them—"nor

But I'll take that pigge (agayne Peter wept),

Tho' I've never a styre for to putte hym in;

A barn where my customys' corn is kept

Is the onlie place I can shutte hym in."

(Syngynge) Diddle dum dandy, &c.

At Peter's I found a remarkable swine,

When some barley I toke there to grynde;

Each part was so wonderful fatte ande fyne,

Hys before was just lyke hys behynde.

(Syngynge) Diddle dum dandy, &c.

And Peter still keeps that prodigious fyne swyne,

Ande the Lorde onlie knows how he's fedde;

But never againe Peter sees corne of myne

Till that wonderful pigge be dead.

(Syngynge) Diddle dum dandy, &c.

anything else, for the matter of that," Peter said, when he got down a chine for their supper one Friday. Peter was intensely secular, and could in no wise agree with the abbot ; for the abbot was an austere man (when not alone in his buttery), and preferred sackcloth to sack (so he said), and ashes to stews. He was seldom at the mill ; but sent his mendicants freely, with a view partly to reforming Peter by their holy discourse, and partly to keep them alive at his expense. Even in that age, dark as it was, the meanest capacity could perceive how proper and right it is that dissenters should support those they differ from. So the poor Franciscans ate heartily out of Peter's flesh-pots, and were welcome to all they ate. It is very questionable, however, whether the other object with which they were sent was as successfully fulfilled, and whether Peter was not reforming them rather than they him ; for they ate in silence, and rarely spoke when they were filled. They nudged each other into wakefulness when the miller profanely jested, and only hinted at his sin by smothering their

laughter and counting their beads. But they were not without gratitude, poor mendicants, and were ever ready to chop wood or draw water for their host. One stole a buck for him, and another pitched the inland-revenue officer into a horse-pond, and a third perjured himself to save Peter from the pillory; and by a thousand other delicate acts of kindness the rest in their simple way tried to repay the miller for his friendship. Amongst the brethren was a young friar named Cy-mon, who had a great fondness for music and flesh-pots. Peter, in his blunt jocular way, said that Cy-mon was born with a strong *turn* for music, and a long *twist* for bacon. He was a genius. Almost unassisted, he built an organ for the chapel. It was not a very grand affair. He planned it upon the principle of the German concertina, to which its tones bore an indifferent ill resemblance. It had no stops; but he could play on it without stopping, as the brethren were aware to their cost. He wrote music, and would sit up night after night composing and composing,

until he composed himself to sleep. He supplied the institution with virginals and voluntaries; fortunately, however, it did not rely for support upon his voluntary contributions. Besides this, he could play upon the viol; "violly," Peter said. (Peter slurred his words abominably, and might have said "vilely," but that Cymon knew otherwise.) He possessed a sweet tenor voice; but though a tenor, he was not quite a fool. That the friars chose to put peas in their ears when he sat down at his organ and opened his mouth to sing, was no proof of *his* folly: he sang to please himself and not them, and in this, especially as regarded them, he succeeded. Cymon was a constant visitor at the mill, where his musical exhibitions were of an entirely lay character. He taught Adele, the miller's daughter, and wrote songs for her. Indeed, she was worthy of a poet's homage, and, here, of earlier introduction. Peter had no more resemblance in his daughter than the bulb in the lily that springs from it. He was short and fat; she tall and thin. He boisterous

and familiar ; she pensive and reserved. But why tell of her many charms ? Are they not sung in a thousand songs of Cymon ? * And why were they sung in his songs ? Ah me ! poor Cymon loved. He taught Adele to sing of the love she herself inspired. Bending over her as she sat before his organ, he touched with his lips her red-brown hair, and breathed its fragrance. As with trembling hands he placed her fingers on the keys, he learned how cool and soft and slender they were. Turning the sheet of music, her breath all warm bathed his cheek like the sweet perfume blown from a summer rose. He stood before her when her soul was moved by ecstasy of sound, her face sparkling in the gray morning light of spring. He sat beside her when the dark profile of her face was revealed against the crimson glow of autumn eve. He beheld her perfect shape in the warm firelight glow of winter. He saw her moving, sleeping ; he heard her voice near and afar ; at all times, in every mood, he

* They are ; but no matter—let them pass.

gleaned material for his lyrics. She was beautiful, and her father was in very comfortable circumstances; and considering these circumstances, need it be wondered at that several young men, with matrimonial (amongst other) intentions, sought to gain favour with the miller's daughter? But she coolly and emphatically rejected the suit of each succeeding lover, if those so thoroughly unsuccessful can be said to have succeeded. In sooth, it seemed as if she was susceptible to no such feeling as love—as if that were the one thing wanting to render her perfect; like life to the beautiful statue of Pygmalion, or the celestial fire to the beings of Prometheus. And yet she had youth and health, and delighted in all that is good and beautiful and pleasing to the senses. Therein possibly lay the secret of her disliking her suitors. She cultivated everything that elevates the mind—from scarlet-runners to habits of cleanliness—but most she affected music. The age was neither refined nor musical, and the airs and graces assumed by young men were of an objectionable kind.

Poor Cymon was the only one of her admirers who had no intentions. How could a poor friar, with not a sou in his pocket—indeed, without even a pocket for a sou; with no upper leathers* to his boots, and nothing but a cowl on his head, in lieu of the genteel chimney-pot of society; how could he, who had literally nothing, make an offer? Adele was the lady he worshipped; Mother Church he neglected; and his devotional exercises were based upon the scale of C. Adele seemed to him a necessary part of his existence—almost part of himself; and when she was beside him he felt beside himself, as it were, with joy. When away from her, he revelled in sweet retrospection, or indulged his imagination in scenes of future bliss where he and she mutually figured. He was particular with regard to his personal appearance, and put his nimbus

* The use of upper leathers was restricted to the rich: hence the term “upper class.” Young ladies of the period occasionally wore shoes with sandals; Cymon wore sandals without the shoes. A piece of yellow deal worn under the foot was its sole protection.

in papers every night. He washed himself every morning—an act of effeminacy for which he was sufficiently derided by the fraternity. But she was calmly indifferent to his appearance; as she would have been had he made no appearance at all. When, with a beating heart and a roll of music, he entered the room where she sat, his hope that she might greet him with some slightest token of pleasure was blighted by her utter disregard. She would continue with her work until it was finished without bestowing a word upon him. Cymon, in truth, did little to alter this state of things or bring about a better. So impressed was he with her beauty and his own insignificance, that he could not open his lips, or do aught but stand respectfully distant, gazing with immovable eyes upon her lovely face. She could not be ignorant of his adoration; yet she was unmoved. When she looked up and her eyes met those of the poor love-stricken boy, *his* gave way, *his* lids dropped, *his* cheek crimsoned. Only one with Cymon's humility could understand how she could be so loved and so

unmoved. For Adele, though so cold and indifferent to her own lovers and to Cymon, had a heart that melted with Cymon's songs of other hapless lovers and breaking hearts, and her lovely eyes would fill with tears as she sang of them.

Cymon wrote a song in which he portrayed his own condition and hopeless love, and its pathos so touched Adele's heart that she broke down in singing it. Turning to Cymon, she bade him show her how it should be sung. He began, and his voice was husky and trembled; but presently he became inspired and supreme. His fine eyes expanded, his face gleamed white in the twilight, and his voice, rising high and clear, expressed the infinite sorrow of one yearning hopelessly for love. Through the casement shone a beautiful star, and it seemed to him as he looked at it a symbol of her he loved, so bright, so pure, so forever distant. Ah, if instead of staring at the star, he had looked earthward! Whilst he sang, Adele, sitting at his side, gazed up into his face—love in her eyes, warm blood in her

cheeks, and kissing lips that pouted. As the song ended, Cymon's voice died in exquisite sadness, and for a minute his spirit was with the bright star above him; but in that minute modesty bowed Adele's face, and when he looked down he saw only the shape of her head and the white hands crossed in her lap. The light had faded, or he might have seen that a fold of his rough cloth gown was pressed beneath those fingers. For such folly as that of pressing an inanimate gown will those in love be guilty of. A moral as well as material obscurity invested Adele; through the gathering mists in his eyes Cymon could see but an art-enthusiast sitting beneath him. He stood silently looking down upon that loved head for some time, and each moment Adele expected—and with hope throbbing in her breast—that he would sink on his knees before her and press his lips to her ready hands.

“She hath no heart for me,” Cymon thought, and he moved to go. His gown was caught by something; he stopped, but finding

the movement had released it, passed out of the door. He had wrought himself to such a mood that he felt unable to endure the cold rebuff with which Adele was wont to treat him. Outside he could have fancied a faint voice called his name, but that its tone of tender entreaty made him disbelieve his senses. From her casement Adele could just distinguish his tall figure with bent head wandering slowly under the tall poplars by the mill-stream. She was repentant now. She yearned to tell him that in mere wicked waywardness she had pretended a want of feeling for him she had not felt—to beg his forgiveness, and for evermore to resign sovereignty to him and be *his* slave. But he did not turn; and soon his figure faded from her sight, and for the first time she felt forsaken and desolate.

FYTTE II.

If Cymon was not himself particularly funny, he was at least the cause of fun in others. Amongst the monks there was not a theme

more fruitful of merriment than that of Cymon's hopeless love, for it was palpable to all that he did love. One night the wind howled, and a party of the brethren coming fresh from an incursion upon the buttery, declared it was Cymon, and so dragged him from his bed and bade him go sigh up the chimney; and a weathercock being displaced was affirmed to be the result. They called him *Cyman*, and when he wandered in the moonlight, as youths in his condition are prone to do, they declared he was flirting with the moon, and congratulated him on having two mistresses who would be not likely to quarrel about him. They sang parodies upon his most pathetic songs, and to the lugubrious airs added bow-wow choruses. Countless were the articles they put in his bed, swearing they were souvenirs from his lady-love; and every day, before showing himself at the mill, he had to retire behind a bush and take off his garments, in order to remove the chalk-marks, and the numerous odds and ends ingeniously fastened thereupon. All these things Cymon suffered with the most

perfect temper: he felt he deserved ridicule for loving so far, far above him. But he gloried in so loving, and enjoyed the satisfaction of a martyr in suffering for his devotion. But on the night after he had wandered under the poplars, a jest was made that very differently affected the young friar. He was lying with his eyes open, and his thoughts as usual fixed upon Adele, when he heard her name whispered from the pallet near his by one Stephen, the biggest and burliest monk of the fraternity.

"I should like to tell the poor fellow," said Stephen in an audible whisper; "for it's seldom he hears anything kind from Adele."

"Oh! don't wake him," whispered another. "God knows it's not often we have a quiet night like this, and he's blown a hole in my blanket already with his sighs. Let him sleep."

"I wonder why she spoke so kindly about him."

"Oh! perhaps he's promised never to go near her again," suggested a third.

"You're wrong," said Stephen. "The girl

wants to marry our Cymon." Cymon wondered whether he was awake, or Stephen, as usual, merely jesting.

"Marry our Cymon, why?" Cymon rose in his bed.

"Because she's getting old, and nobody else will have her."

Cymon sprang upon Stephen, and with two blows knocked out three of his teeth. But brother Stephen was not the man to lose his teeth quietly. He was a man of prompt decision, and determined instantly to repent on the morrow and sin to-day, and to take as much present satisfaction as would compensate the discomforts attendant upon future penances. As his third tooth went he rose to his feet and fell upon Cymon. He, poor fellow, had no time to enjoy his temporary success. For before he could say 'Jack Robinson'—even supposing he had wished to—he found himself on his back, with a whole constellation dancing before his eyes, from the effect of a blow from Stephen's fist. There was no chance of victory for him. The gods were against him—so

were the odds. He was no match for Stephen, although he was as thin as one, Heaven knows. Nevertheless he fought, nor crept beneath the bed, nor made any sound which might bring assistance. His only words were, "Stephen, thou art a liar!" Words with which after each fall he rose to his feet and sprang upon his big antagonist.

At length, after a series of short but disastrous rounds, his strength failed him, and he lost consciousness, gasping once again, "Stephen, thou art a liar!" And what did the holy brethren meanwhile? Did they interpose or attempt to sunder the belligerents? or raise an outcry that might bring the fathers to stop the shedding of blood? I regret to say they did not so much as interpose a sheet of paper between the combatants, nor attempt to make peace or quell the disturbance in any way. One Samaritan indeed took compassion on the afflicted, and lifted Cymon when he fell, whispering such words of sweet compassion as, "Poor little beggar! you've got a mouser this time;" "Keep your pecker up,

old man ;” and such tender advice as, “ Take him in the wind ;” “ Let him have it in the bread-basket ;” “ Go it, little un,” etc. And when the fight was over this good Christian laid him in his bed, and anointed his wounds with refreshing vinegar and the soothing steak. The affair was hushed up, so the abbot never knew of it. For even the conscience of a friar could not induce one of them to tell their confessor of the iniquity of that night ; the utmost religion could do was to make them tell their beads : which they did. Cymon’s absence from the mill—for his features were so disfigured that he could not present himself before Adele—he had not the face to—was so singular that Adele, had she been as indifferent to the poor musician as she pretended, could not but notice it. But she was far too haughty to speak to the friars who passed her in the day, or to listen at the latch when she heard Cymon’s name mentioned, and her father slapping his thigh and laughing. So she spent the day in wondering what detained him, and the night in a delightful confusion of unre-

memberable dreams in which he was ever present. The following day he came not, and wonder was mixed with hope; and her dreams were chequered—sweet and fearful. The third day she was anxious and fidgety, and at noon playfully told her father that Cymon had not brought his music to teach her, and that she wondered where he might be. Peter laughed and said: “Here comes Stephen, ask him. Stephen, knowest thou aught of a friar named Cymon?” But Stephen, who was prone to open his mouth on most occasions, on this closed it, to hide the gap in his row of teeth, and scowled at Peter, but answered him not. Adele turned away, for she could not brook being party to a jest between her father and an oaf like Stephen. But her anxiety increased, and when as she stood in her garden at evenfall, and a young friar passed her, she said, trying to look quite unconcerned: “What ails Cymon, that he hath not been to teach me nor scales nor crotchet nor quaver?” Now this friar was none other than Thomas, the backer of Cymon, so he answered readily:

“He lieth in bed with a plaster before and a poultice behind ; yet nathless he getteth on apace.”

“Is he hurt?” asked Adele, pretending to yawn.

“Lady fair, there was a time, and that but yesterday, when it might have been supposed that our Cymon had thrust his head in a Christmas pudding, so round and so black it was ; but happily this day he seeth fairly out of one eye, his nose is reduced to the size of a turnip, and we can just perceive where his mouth may be.” Adele raised her eyebrows, and inclined her head, and Thomas continued : “Our Cymon hath fought a good fight ; never before hath that amiable youth lifted his hand against living thing. No taunt, no cruel jest, no malicious treatment could provoke him to anger ; he was so gentle and good that we said he was a fool, and could be no otherwise ; and lo, one Stephen did but speak lightly of a maid, and our Cymon rose in wrath, and knocked three teeth from his jaw in a twinkling. Even as he swounded he cried, ‘Ste-

phen, thou liest!’ By my saint, he should be a knight-errant rather than a holy friar.”

Adele grew pale and pink and pale again during the narration, and her fingers twitched in the folds of her dress; then she stilled her quivering lips and said, in a voice she strived to control: “And who is the lady for whose honour Cymon fights so bravely?”

“Lady,” replied Thomas, who was himself not without gallantry, “it is one who alone can command such devotion;” and he made a leg, though it wasn’t seen, under his gown. Then Adele stepped aside and plucked a garland of sweet flowers, and giving them to Thomas, said: “Put fresh flowers in his room to gladden his eyes when he awakes; give him these—and this,” she took a bud out of her sweet bosom to swell the posy, “but tell him not from whom they come.” Thomas made another leg and took the flowers to Cymon. Perhaps he kept her injunction and was secret as to whence they came, and perhaps he did no such thing; all the historian knows is that

when Cymon died it was with a shrivelled flower-bud pressed to his heart.

The effects of the battle upon Cymon were of a fleeting and momentary character in comparison with that upon Stephen. Long before the latter, by frequently exploring with his tongue amongst the cavities in his jaws, had become accustomed to the new state of things and was reconciled to his loss, Cymon, with never a speck nor blemish, was tuning his merry lay unto his mistress's fair throat. She, like an insatiable tyrant, kept him in continual subjection. Cymon was the best man she knew—the most cultivated, intellectual, and indeed the most valorous; and it pleased her vain spirit to feel that she was so far above him that all his thoughts were of her and engaged in her service. She was a rose budding among thorns, and Cymon might have plucked and won her, had he been bold enough to disregard the petty protection of the bramble. When he stood beside her, if, instead of gazing in awe and wonder at the beauty of her face, and thinking how vile he was, and how un-

attainable by him was she, he had thrown his arms about her and said, "Thou shalt be mine," Adele would not have dared to answer him—nay, nor have wished to either. Humility breeds tyrants. Sometimes this poor fool felt his heart bleeding within him when his utmost endeavour to please Adele, to earn one slight recompense, failed, and he received but disdain and contempt for his pains and pleasures. Again Adele listened to a song he had composed, and its sweetness thrilled her through; but she overcame the impulse to show her delight and tell Cymon of her admiration, and merely pitched the vellum out of the window, begging to know whether if he tried he could not contrive to bring her something worth learning. Cymon sighed and thought, "What fools and egotists we writers are! I actually thought that composition good." When he left Adele he paused to pick up the rejected MS. in order that he might discover its errors and avoid them in future productions. Adele leaned from the window and asked him for it. His heart beat as he handed it to her. "Thank you," she

said ; “the parchment will serve for the window when the winter comes.” It was some time before he again submitted copy for consideration ; but all his leisure he occupied in composing a song which should eclipse all others. And on this song—although he did not admit the fact even to himself—he felt his destiny depended. If anything would strike a spark out of Adele’s flinty bosom this would ; if it failed, then nothing in this world was worth trying for. Day after day he revised, corrected, and composed, until at last he found it was capable of no farther improvement. It was perfect. Then one evening he took it to Adele, and with unusual confidence, he said, “I have brought a song that is worthy even of you.” Adele marked this assertion of spirit, and determined, cost what it might, to suppress it. She turned her back upon Cymon, that he might read no emotion in her face, and tried not to listen to his song, that she might condemn it the more freely. Nevertheless the delicious melody, no less than the eloquence of the poetry, touched her inmost heart. She felt

that her lover's whole soul breathed in the sweet words he sang. Tears rolled down her cheeks as Cymon sang the two concluding stanzas to the gentle accompaniment of his viol :—

“ Roses are red,

(*accompaniment*) Diddle diddle.

Violets are blue ;

You love not me,

Diddle diddle.

Though I love you.

Could them there flowers *

Diddle diddle.

Alter their dyes,

Then might we love

Diddle diddle.

Contrariwise.”

The emotion was too much for Cymon. At the last word he dropped his viol on the floor, and sank upon the table. There succeeded a silence, which was broken by a stifled sob from Adele. In a moment Cymon threw himself at her feet, asking : “ Why do you sob, Adele ? ”

* Grammar-schools were not then founded.

As swiftly Adele summoned resolution, and rising, proudly answered: "Because I am disappointed once more." Then Cymon groaned; and he went out and threw himself in the mill-stream—just as he was. He went down with all his sins on his head; he did not stay even to take off his sandals. Adele saw him speed over the meed and plunge into the water. Ah, how different to most youths was he! Ordinarily simple in appearance, he became splashy only in his disappearance.

Adele shrieked and fainted. When she revived, Peter and others sought Cymon; but, alas, too late! They dragged the river with such simple contrivance for saving life as was known at that time—to wit, an eel-spear; but they succeeded in getting nothing out save Cymon's sandals and some remarkably fine eels, by which they concluded that these voracious fish had eaten the former clean out of the latter. So Peter and the friars wetted one eye with a tear for the poor fellow, and the other with a "little something," as the miller called a beaker of ale.

But Adele was inconsolable, and grieved secretly and deeply. People, seeing how altered she was becoming, lifted their eyebrows, and looked significantly one at another, saying nothing. Peter suffered by her distress ; he, whose whole life had been laughter, now sat quiet in the chimney of a night, looking with distress and anxiety at the pale shadow that represented his daughter. A child, a woman, a boor, might now have commanded Adele's obedience. The thought of him whom she had goaded to his death was never from her. She sat for long spells by the river-side, looking through the clear water as if for him. Poor old Peter would leave his ricks and go and sit beside her, taking her hand in his, and saying never a word, as men do* when they sympathise. She did not speak or exhibit any knowledge that he was beside her, but still sat there, with her lips closed and her eyes fixed. The anxious old fellow could not sleep with the peace and regularity he had been used to ; frequently he rose in the night and went to her

* Or don't.

room, almost expecting to find her bed empty. He would wake with a start, and sit trembling in bed, thinking it was a splash from the adjacent stream that woke him, and fearing to put his fears to confirmation. As each day passed, Adele appeared to grow thinner and paler and more languid. Peter believed that she was slowly dying, and that soon she would be no more there to gratify his pride and to comfort him; slowly fading from him, yet surely, irrevocably as the sun's decline, and with an end as inevitable as the cheerless night. He thought that if he could interest her in anything, he might restore her to a more natural state of existence, and with this view begged her to cultivate her neglected garden. Obedient, she strove to do his bidding; but she was easily fatigued, and when Peter, watching her endeavours, saw her lean for support upon a sapling which once would have broken beneath her, he went to her and took her in his arms, and said she should work no more.

“I am so weary and so tired,” was all she

could say. How could such employment interest her, whose soul, whose every sense, was with the past—far, so mysteriously far away? But Peter knew his theory was right, and another time he hummed one of the tunes Cymon had composed, dubious of the result, and anxious. Adele lifted her eyes from the fire, and looking across at her father, smiled sadly.

“Prythee, sing me that tune,” said Peter. Then for the first time since her loss she sang. The following day she spent in playing her dead lover’s melodies.

FYTTE III.

Of course, Cymon was not dead. When the waters closed over him, as waters will, a sensation exceedingly like that of drowning came over him, and he threw his arms about. Then a sensation as of large long shining eels wandering furtively amidst his legs induced him to kick; and so he came to the top of the water like a bubble, and, like a bubble, felt very much like bursting. He sank again, and

second impressions were still more disagreeable than the first. Therefore when he struggled up the bank and found himself on solid and dry ground once again, he was exceedingly rejoiced. But upon this emotion came one of a quite different character: what would Adele, who had doubtless seen him go in, say to his getting out? What shafts of deserved ridicule would be now shot at him! Could he ever again show his face before her? No, he could not—he would not. Ere he heard again her derisive laugh he would perish, but on earth. So he took to his heels, and ran far out of that part of the country. He did not stop until his clothes were dry, and his throat still more so. He arrived before a house, and knocked at the door. A surly brute opened it, and inquired what he wanted.

“A crust o’ bread,” were the words generally used by the Franciscans on such occasions; but Cymon, feeling he was now a mendicant no more, and consequently not bound to the euphemistic lie, answered: “Drink.”

“Oh! I know that by the cut of thy cloth.”

“Charity.”

“Haven’t got any.”

“I’m a representative of the Established Church.”

“Fico for the Church ! I’m a Quaker.” *

“Then behave like a *friend* and I’ll sing thee a song.”

“Oh ! come in. I see thou art an honest man.”

Cymon entered, and they gave him liquor ; but it was so bad that it rendered him lachrymose, and he sang wretchedly. Then they gave him a penny, begged him to go into the next turning, and bade him God-speed. Cymon had never before possessed so much wealth, and he determined at once to relinquish religion for a trade that was so much better paid. Singing was the description of calling to which he felt himself called. So he went to a Hebrew, and changed his sober gown away for a tunic and tights that had once been gay, and a hat that had seen a better day ; and also he changed his penny for a farthing. Money in those days

* Query—Shaker ? Compo.

was money ; and likewise Hebrews were Jews, Then forth—or say secondly—he went from city to city, performing his melancholy airs, and gaining fame in each. For his airs were melancholy. He could not forget Adele, and though bitterness rankled in his heart, his dominant feeling was of disappointment and hopes for ever crushed. He became famous over all Europe ; and the melancholy minstrel could command a place before sovereigns, and sovereigns before he took it. He assumed the euphonious name of Tomkin, and his only instruments were a whistle of tin and an earthen pipkin.*

FYTTE IV.

It was become so dull at the mill, that seldom the friars did more, after transacting their business, than toss off a gallon or two of

* When indulging the public with an instrumental performance, he was wont to stand in the middle of the street with a pipkin of water at his feet with which he would occasionally wet his whistle.

ale and bid the miller farewell. The friar Thomas occasionally passed a miserable hour in Peter's society, as a sort of duty commanded by the religion of friendship. On one occasion he heard Adele singing, and he took advantage of a pause to open a conversation upon music, thinking thereby to interest one who now devoted all her time to that accomplishment.

"Hast thou heard of the new tenor?" he began meekly.

"Fico for new tenors!" Adele was upon the point of answering. She checked herself, however, and replied merely, "No."

"He is making a pretty stir. A venerable pilgrim, yesterday returned from the plain of Jericho, declares that the Jerichians go mad when they hear him, and avers that nothing like his performance on the tin-whistle has been heard since the day when Noah walked out without his umbrella, whistling for fair weather."

"Bah!" replied Adele. "Could any tenor, bass, or baritone equal this?" . . .
(She hummed a snatch from one of Cymon's

favourite airs.) “Or that?” (Theme from his op. 999.) “Or those?” (A few bars from his ‘Mouse-trap,’ a sweet thing in G.) She continued to instance peculiar beauties in Cymon’s opera, until Thomas regretted having opened the subject. But Adele was excited and aroused. Who was this who dared to occupy a place in the world which only her dead lover deserved? Who was this that should be worshipped in place of the one who alone was perfect? She burned with indignation against the unknown troubadour, and with a feeling of rage that, whilst the fame of his works spread from Jericho to John o’ Groat’s, the divine compositions of Cymon should lie unknown, unsung by the multitude. Her father had never before seen her so excited. That night she made a resolve, and the next day she made—well, never mind what; suffice it to say, she was busy with her needle all day. For a fortnight after that she plied her needle incessantly, with what purpose Peter was at a loss to conceive. When she failed one morning to make her appearance at the breakfast-table,

Peter, with a groan of apprehension, went to her bedroom to find her—not there. A packet lay on the table; he opened it, and found the entire crop of her back hair, with these lines:

“Beloved Papa,—I shall return. Until then, as a keepsake, take care of enclosed back hair. I have cut it. Vale!

“ADELE.”

And Adele, with shortened hair and a kirtle curtailed, took upon herself the name of Cymon, and, to immortalise his name and stultify the upstart Tomkin, went abroad singing the songs of her lost lover.

FYFFE V.

Cymon—or, to avoid confusion, let him be called by his pseudonym Tomkin—was frequently invited to the tables of the rich. For the rich found this an agreeable, and withal an inexpensive, method of complimenting the artist, entertaining their guests, and displaying their own taste. One afternoon, whilst he was

shedding a silent tear, he heard how a minstrel of surpassing melancholy, youthful, beautiful, with a charming voice and the most fascinating manner, was enchanting with his wondrous melodies the ears of all streets that heard him, and that the minstrel's name was Cymon. When he heard this, Tomkin jumped from his seat, overturning the nobleman's table at which he was sitting, and smashing the very valuable dinner-service.

"It is nothing, nothing!" he said, putting his hand to his fevered brow. The mention of that name he had once borne overcame him.

Opinion in musical circles was divided—one side declared that Tomkin's melodies were more elegant than Cymon's, and the other swore that Cymon's were far more refined than Tomkin's. Each side was dogmatic, and called the other hard names, but both agreed that the styles were entirely dissimilar. In this dispute the two musicians felt deeply interested; but what was Tomkin's indignation when he heard from a critic, who actually had heard both performers, that the minstrel calling

himself Cymon was actually singing Tomkin's choicest morceaux as his own; and what was Adele's consternation when the same critic informed her that the troubadour of the tin-whistle and earthen pipkin, who called himself Tomkin, was palming off on a gullible public Cymon's own airs with the assurance that they were original, and he (Tomkin) the composer. The two minstrels vowed they would seek, find, and hiss each other. At last one city held them both, and the musical public was half out of its senses. Tomkin announced upon the walls that he would give an evening concert; and an hour later there was another announcement to the effect that the troubadour Cymon would hold a matinée on the same day. There was such a crowd in the hall to hear the minstrel Cymon, that the minstrel Tomkin, who had tuned his lips for a hiss, could find no place; but recognising him, the mob made way, and gave him a back seat in the gallery. When the candles were snuffed the audience clapped; Tomkin groaned; upon which some one knock his hat over his eyes, and told him,

in the quaint diction of the period, to “shut up.” Before Tomkin could get his head out of his hat the minstrel Cymon stepped upon the stage, and there was a thunder of applause. From the interior of his hat Tomkin hissed fiercely and furiously, like a live coal in a slop-pail. Then some one knocked his hat off and pitched it over into the pit, swearing he would throw Tomkin after it if he did not “turn it up.”* There was, however, no necessity to carry out this threat. For Tomkin no sooner beheld Cymon than he fainted, and was quietly shoved under the bench. The eyes, the mouth, the nose, every feature of the opposition minstrel—except the legs—were what he remembered of Adele.† When he

* It seems that the gallery audience was vulgar, and addicted to slang.

† The following quip set to a lively air he presented to his wife soon after the nuptials :

Much more of her locks,
But less of her hocks,
She displayed in a gown, you'll allow, sirs :

revived, it seemed to him as though he were again teaching Adele. The voice he heard was hers; the song she sang was his. He sat up and beheld Adele, recognising her spite of her shortened hair and the gay troubadour dress she had assumed. He shrieked applause, and the manager sent an official in blue, who turned him out into the miserable street. He rushed to the stage-door and bribed a messenger. As Adele sat in her room, flushed and bright with her success, the messenger tapped at her door, and taking off his cap, thrust a head and a long arm into the apartment. He handed a card, saying: "If you please, sir, the gent's a-waitin' outside." Adele took the card and read—on the face,

TROUBADOUR TOMKIN,

Professor of Music.

But more of her hocks,

And less of her locks,

She exhibits when wearing the —.

I loved her then and now; yes I confess

I dote upon her always, more or less.

On the back,

*Troubadour T. begs a private and brief interview with
Troubadour C.*

Adele expected nothing short of a row ; but her voice was in such excellent condition, that she felt quite equal to it, and bade the messenger usher up the professor. When Tomkin stood before her an expression of pain crossed her face. There was something about this man's face that strangely brought to her mind the lover who was eaten by the eels. But he who stood before her was different from the attenuated friar Cymon ; for he had suffered his hair to grow, and the yellow curls fell upon his broad shoulders. Travel and exercise had developed his figure, and no man in merrie England had a better set body nor a shapelier leg than the Troubadour Tomkin. He was pale when he entered, but presently a rich glow came in his fair cheek, and his eyes sparkled bright and clear. They had no row. Cymon (Tomkin he shall be never more), after a few complimentary remarks upon the performance

he had heard, opened a conversation upon music, and sang several new songs of his composition. Then he protested that it was folly for two artists, so great, to be rivals, and proposed that they should learn duets and be partners.

Adele could only listen. The voice was like Cymon's, only that it was more cheerful, and the songs that he sang were, even to her ear, inclined as it was to be prejudiced against them, equal to his. The resemblance between this man and him she had loved was almost perfect.

"Look, you," said Cymon—artful dog!—"we can continue partners only so long as is agreeable, which I opine will be until we find partners more suitable—hey, my dear fellow?"

"What dost thou mean?" asked Adele.

"Matrimonial partners, dear boy."

"Art thou going to marry?"—a sigh.

"I hope so."

"I never shall." She dropped her eyes and a tear.

“Viol-stick ends! Wait till we find a pretty girl.”

“A pretty *girl*—O yes, yes!” Adele looked up with a smile; a smile that did not vanish as she looked upon the handsome face before her. She thought how handsome he was, and how nice; and a heretical little thought, that it would be pleasant to be loved by such a nice fellow, crept into her heart, and the next moment was banished, as unworthy to be where the image of sainted Cymon ruled. She dropped her eyes and blushed, and then was pale and grave.

“By the way,” continued Cymon—he was growing awfully wicked very suddenly—“what a pity you are a man! You’re too pretty to be anything but a girl. But going from that subject, why do you wear your cloak so unbecomingly, my dear fellow? Believe me, they are not worn now over the chest like that. Throw it back, and have your collar open like mine, thus.”

Adele’s face became crimson; she rose indignantly to her feet; then recollecting the

part she played, she sank into her seat, a tear of shame glittering upon her long lashes. That cut Cymon to the heart, and repentance for his want of delicate feeling rankled in the wound. He threw himself upon his knees at Adele's feet.

"Forgive me, forgive me!" he cried, looking up to her through eyes bewildered and dizzy with passion and regret. Here he forgot the part he was playing, but Adele remembered hers.

"There's nothing to forgive. We are both men, and a joke's a joke."

"Give me your hand to show that you forgive me." He held her hand between his as only a man can hold the hand of a woman he loves, and looked still steadfastly up into the beloved face above him. In that face the colour came and fled with the varying and tumultuous emotions that thrilled her breast. She had a dawning perception that this was a lover at her feet who penetrated her disguise. She was convinced when Cymon took her hands to

his glowing face, and kissed them again and again.

“What does this mean?” she asked.

“I love thee, I love thee, Adele, Adele!”

The colour left her cheeks: this dreadful, delightful man knew her name.

He was on his feet and stepped towards her. She retreated, saying:

“No, no; I must not—that is, I cannot love thee. I have sworn I will love none but him—Cymon who is gone. You, who have discovered me, you, who tempt me, leave me.” She faltered, and leaned for support against the wall. Her heart beat unaccountably and against her utmost endeavours to control it, with fond yearnings towards this man—this idealised resemblance of her dead lover; and it seemed to her that in banishing him she was losing her Cymon once more. Whilst standing trembling and agitated with these thoughts the bold minstrel strode to her side, and girdled her for the first time with his arm.

“Thou shalt love me, and I will love thee,” he said. His voice was low and soft, like the

sweet voice cherished in her memory ; and as she said, " Go, go," her voice died, and her head sank upon his breast.

Then disengaging his arm from her waist, but still supporting her upon his bosom, he took the viol from his back, and holding it over her head, played and softly sang once more :

"Roses are red,
 (*on the viol*) Diddle diddle.

Violets are blue ;
Thou lovest me,
 Diddle diddle.

And I love you.
Until these flowers
 Diddle diddle.

Alter their dyes,
We shall not do
 Diddle diddle.

Contrariwise."

As Adele lay there in an ecstasy of joy, the

sounds from above, especially that of the viol,* seemed to her like music from Paradise, and she knew that her Cymon was restored to her.

* It was customary to rasp the bow over the strings *above* the bridge.



Hun, who Slew the King.



HUN, WHO SLEW THE KING.



I.

IN Hoetia to this day they tell of Hun who slew the king; and this is the story of Hun. Long ago Hoetia was divided into two kingdoms—Cadoly, whose king was Bertram; and Petria, whose king was John. These two kings were rivals, as the kings of Cadoly and Petria had ever been, and frequently went to war the one against the other. When they were not fighting, they were preparing to fight—welding their broken arms, and training young men to fill the place of those slain. But after twenty years of warfare there was a peace, which bid fair to be of a more lasting

character than any that had preceded it. For Roland, the son of King John, lost his heart to Alice, the daughter of King Bertram; and sought to recover it by possessing her in marriage. Bertram's daughter was just arrived at womanhood. She was surpassingly beautiful, but besides her beauty she possessed the gentlest spirit and sweetest manners of any lady in the world. Many princes and nobles sued for her hand, but in vain. Either they were rejected by Alice or her father. For the princess's heart was yet untouched by love; and Bertram, who was justly proud of her, declared she should marry one in every way worthy of her, or no one. At length Roland came to the court of King Bertram, and sued for Alice's hand. And Bertram bade his daughter encourage the young prince, countenanced his frequent visits, and slept with a handkerchief over his head after dinner, leaving the young people to their own devices. Alice obeyed her father; but she did not appear particularly fond of Roland. That did not trouble the king: he was a diplomatist, and extremely

long in the head. King John of Petria felt vastly flattered by the preference given to his son over all other princes, and the two monarchs were so affable and polite, that the priests laid aside their sermons upon the righteousness of war, and read homilies upon the iniquity of bloodshed ; and a somewhat speculative farmer from an adjoining kingdom rented a favourite battle-field in Cadoly, and actually sowed it with wheat ; an ominous speculation that the armourers regarded with sorrow, albeit most people vowed the farmer must have more wealth than wit. This state of amity was precisely what Bertram required, and though he loathed the sight of King John's son, he effectually concealed his disgust in order to protract the peace. For he had suffered very greatly in his last campaign, and required more leisure for recruiting his strength than John was in the habit of allowing him. Meanwhile he secretly enlisted and equipped an enormous army. When his armament was completed, and ready to do battle, he indulged his long-pent-up feelings of hatred towards Prince

Roland in a simple manner—to wit, he kicked the young man downstairs. The same evening he marched out his army, and camped upon the wheat which was shooting up in his favourite battle-field.

But John's revenge was speedy. That very night, in a manner so subtle and complete that none discovered how it was done, he succeeded in kidnapping the beautiful Alice, and bearing her right away from her father's palace and country. Bertram was furious, and became still more enraged when he found that John had with equal secrecy collected and equipped an army more vast and powerful than his own, and which there was no withstanding. Bertram was attacked and utterly routed, and forced to retreat precipitately, leaving the cornfields in the possession of King John. The discomfited king called his chiefs about him, and solemnly vowed that whoso should rescue and recover the Princess Alice out of the hands of King John should have her for his guerdon, and half the kingdom to boot. Then out from amongst the nobles strode Hun, and swore he would do

this thing, or die. Now Hun was the deftest and most valiant knight in Cadoly, and long and deeply he had loved Alice. They had been playmates ; but when the boy grew and his affection was observed, he was forbidden to approach the princess. When he became a man, he had pleaded for her hand ; but though he was the bravest and best knight in the land, it had been denied him. He could perform wondrous feats with the sword ; and his will was as strong as his arm. Before he asked for the princess in marriage, he said, “ I will marry her or none ; ” and being rejected, he resigned himself to his lot, sadly yet manfully giving up all the bright hopes his youth had indulged in. And now, as he strode out before King Bertram, those hopes returned, and the wildest joy throbbed in his veins. The king took his hand and pressed it ; and the priest, by way of encouragement, impressively read a few passages from the burial service over him. Then Hun laid aside his armour, and assumed the habit of a minstrel—a ruse which at that time was quite

novel; and having passed the lines, entered the camp of King John, and presented himself before the royal pavilion. Now the king was elated with his victory, and determined to spend the night in revelry; and being extremely partial to comic songs, he greeted Hun with much cordiality. He gave him to drink from his own beaker, and bade him stand on the table and sing. Hun was quick-witted, and whilst he sang cast his eyes about in search of the fair maiden he sought. Not a smooth face could he see; but he presently bethought him of a method of making inquiries without arousing suspicion; and upon descending from the table to refresh himself, he told the baron who plied him with wine, that he intended to sing a topic song, alluding to the triumphs of the day, and begged to know if there were any incident worthy especial comment. "Well," replied the baron, "you may refer to the capture of the Princess Alice, and how our noble Prince Roland bore her away from her father's palace to his own pavilion." Then Hun insisted upon singing the song in character, and

begged that he might be arrayed as a Petrian warrior, to sing of Petria's triumph. So the baron, thinking it good fun, dressed Hun in his own proof. The jingling of the armour about his body was like music to the ears of Hun, and he laughed beneath his vizor as they buckled a sword upon his hip. He sang his song, and King John brake his horn upon the table, so enthusiastically did he applaud. He made Hun sit beside him and drink with him; and told stories in his ear, until he slipped under the table, unable to tell more. After him the barons also slipped under the table; and when all were gone—so far gone, indeed, that not one amongst them could have moved to save his life—Hun arose, and carelessly strolled from the pavilion. Outside was a watchfire, and the sentinels, seeing the familiar accoutrements of the baron, saluted Hun, who leisurely wandered thence through the camp. Not far from the king's pavilion was another, all richly emblazoned. A fire was burning before it; and in the opening stood a tall young man, speaking to the two

guards. He ceased to speak, and entered the pavilion; and the guards, saluting, marched at a distance around it. Hun approached, and one of the men, stepping towards him, said respectfully, "Prince Roland has forbidden any one to approach his tent this night."

"Know you whom I am?" said Hun, looking at the guard boldly.

The guard saluted and answered, "My orders are from the prince."

"Then tell you the prince that his father slumbers, and the enemy moves."

Hun turned and walked away a hundred yards into the shadow of a tent, from which, unseen, he could yet see all that passed in front of the prince's pavilion. But whilst he kept his eyes fixed in that direction, he swiftly and silently stripped the armour from his body.

First he took the bright sword from its scabbard and laid it at his feet; next he removed the greaves from his legs, and then his breast and back plates, and his helm. Presently he stood unencumbered. They were anxious moments, for, careful as he was, his

movements were not without noise, and as he put down his cuirass there came a murmur from the tent beside him. He held his breath, and stooping, grasped the unsheathed sword at his feet. Two voices spoke within the tent, and presently a flap was thrown back, and a black head was protruded; but at that moment the figure Hun had seen addressing the guard stepped from the prince's pavilion into the light of the fire, buckling on his sword, and the black head disappeared, saying, "'Tis only Prince Roland." Then the flap was pulled over, and there was quiet in the tent. Meanwhile the prince had spoken again to the sentinels, and strode away in the direction of the king's pavilion, leaving them upon guard before the entrance of his own. Thus was the back left unguarded, and hither swiftly sped Hun, keeping as he approached in the shadow of the surrounding tents. Hun lifted the baron's keen sword, and whipped a fissure five ells deep in the wall of golden cloth, and quickly stepped through, heedless whether the sharp snap of the splitting cloth were heard or not. The pavilion was

divided into two chambers; the one Hun entered was dimly lit by a lamp standing upon an oak table. The sides and top were hung with pink silks, and near the table was a bed, whereof the snowy pillows were clouded with a woman's loosened hair. No need had Hun of a lamp to see that there lay his quest. He knew whose hair strewed the pillows. Rather was there necessity to avoid such desperate waste of precious life-priced moments. But on some occasions we do more than is necessary. He did take the lamp, holding it over the fair sleeper's head, as he marked the smile upon her round cheek, and marvelled at her wondrous beauty. And a feeling of wild exultation throbbed in his heart, as he thought that this incomparable creature was his. He trembled from head to foot with the excitement of success, for it seemed to him that the prize was already won. But the voice of Prince Roland, speaking in an adjoining chamber, realised to him his actual position. A rug of dark sables hung upon a seat beside him. He snatched it up, blew out the lamp,

and before the princess could awake, she was enveloped in the soft folds of the rug, lifted upon Hun's broad shoulder, and carried out into the night.

There was an alarm sounded in the camp, and some, as they peered out from their tents, beheld an object passing before their sleep-veiled eyes; but before they could lay hand on sword it was lost in the obscurity. An outpost saw a figure bearing down upon him, saw a blade twinkling in the light of the distant picket fire, and heard it singing in the air as a voice cried, "Fly, or die!" and the outpost very wisely flew, and said nothing of the matter until many years after. An outpost of King Bertram's army challenged the fugitive, and was answered, "It is I, Hun, who have recovered the lost princess." Then there was an alarm in the camp of King Bertram, and, the news spreading, there arose a shout of triumph, which was heard by the humiliated army in the camps of King John.

All this was the result of that king's familiarity with comic minstrels.

The shock of her capture and recapture was more than the delicate constitution of the princess could support, and for some time she was too weak and ill to conform with her father's wishes. For Bertram was faithful to his word, and plighted beautiful Alice to Hun the very night of her recapture. And when a week had passed, he would brook no further delay, but bade Hun lay aside his sword and take his well-won bride. So Hun gathered his friends and took a handsome white horse for his bride, and bent his knee before her. But when he looked at her, he was greatly concerned and grieved, and his sorrow appeared in his grave manly face. When he saw the princess in the prince's pavilion her face had lost none of its roundness, and the rich hangings reflected a beautiful healthful glow upon it. But since then her cheek had waxed thin, and he saw that it was white, and that her eyes were bright and large to an unnatural degree. The smile with which she greeted her husband was full of weariness; and the hand was chill that she held out to him. Hun took her hand,

and rising, said he was come to carry her away once more. She bowed her head and arose from her seat, and she was so weak that she would have fallen, but for the strong arm of Hun. As he drew her to his breast he felt her tremble, as a captured bird when the fowler takes it in his hand. Hun's heart sank within him as he noted her tremor, and guessed its cause. When he had set her upon a seat he considered a time; and then turning to his friends, he begged them leave him for a space. And after they were gone he said: "You remember me, Alice, and how we were playmates as children, and how I loved you then. I have loved you and only you since. When your hand was denied me, I grieved; and when the chance of winning you was offered me, I rejoiced. I braved death, and won you; but I will do more than this for your sake." Alice looked up into his face questioningly, and Hun continued, "All that I have won I will give up, and all I hoped for I will renounce, if you love another, and if you feel that all a true heart

may prompt me to do will fail to give you joy."

Alice's eyes had not moved from the face of her lover whilst he spoke, and when he ceased her strained eyes were suffused with tears. She put her face in her hands and pondered for some time; then she rose to her feet strong with a fixed purpose, and moved her lips to speak. The thought that filled her soul, and the resolve she had taken, will be remembered when she and Hun stand before the Everlasting; but she never spake them. For at that moment there sounded the rattle of arms, the arras was lifted, and King Bertram, all besmeared as he had left the battle-field, and sweating with haste, stood before them.

"We have won a victory over John," said he, "and whilst my troops rejoice after their heart, I will rejoice after mine. I am right glad I am in time to bestow my child on thee, dear Hun."

Hun looked at Alice, and she said, "Father, noble Hun has offered to relinquish me, and—"

“Wherefore?” asked Bertram.

“I am not worthy of him.”

“Who says so?”

“I—I, I, who cannot return his goodness and his love with mine.”

The King’s brow darkened as he strode across the room; he paused and said, “This is the vapouring of a foolish girl, and not the decision of a king’s daughter. To all lovers you have said this; and did we heed it further, you would marry none. Body and soul you are his who saved you from your father’s foe. Is my blood weakened by transmission, that nought of nobleness flows in your veins? Shake off these flimsy girlish fancies, and appear as beseems a princess. Your king commands. Obey!” Alice was bewildered by the passion of her father, and she looked like a timid fawn that is pursued, and knows not whither to turn. Then the king’s voice softened, and he said: “Alice, I have denied you nothing and never asked return. When you rejected the princes I brought you, I did not press their suits. A father now asks you

to do that which his heart desires to see done. Take Hun to you, and bless my old age with noble children, that shall carry the glory of Cadoly to posterity when I am gone. Think what I owe, what you owe, to him who saved you from disgrace ; and think how but for him that disgrace must have killed me. All know Hun—‘ Hun the brave ’ : no word was ever breathed against him. Who may help loving one so noble and generous and good ? Love, though a stranger to you now, will come. Come here to my arms, darling. There, there. You consent : now go to your husband.” Then Hun said to himself against his conscience, being tempted, “ She will yet love me, and all will be well ; ” and he opened his arms to receive the girl he knew loved him not. Alice left her father’s arms, twining her fingers as if she would break them, and distraction knitted her brows. Her eyes turned upon Hun, and she cried as one that is pierced with a sword as she stepped swiftly forward and placed herself in his arms. And if the timid fawn, beset on all sides, turn and leap down

the bottomless ravine, who shall feel aught but pity?

And so Alice was wedded to Hun; and whilst the king returned to the battle-field, Hun bore his bride up into the pine-covered hills where his castle stood. He was to spend a fortnight with his wife, and then head his retinue in Bertram's cause to fight his foes. Alice had lived chiefly upon the plain, and the hills, with their clear sharp air and broken views, were new and charming to her. It gladdened Hun's heart to see the pleasure his wife took in the strange plants he gathered for her, and the beautiful scenes he revealed to her. They would wander all day quite alone, like ordinary rustic holiday-makers, Hun carrying on his back a basket with provender, and in his hand a long stick. They scaled steep rocks, and wound by mountain paths up and up to the hill-summits whence they could see the sunlit clouds beneath them. The exercise brought colour into Alice's cheek, animation to her eyes, and a smile upon her lips; and Hun, looking at her, would be transported with

love, and seizing her in his arms, kiss her again and again. It seemed as though his highest hopes were to be realized, and when his wife slept, he would thank God for so blessing him. "She will love me as I love her, and my happiness and hers will be one," he said.

Thus happily passed twelve days, and for the first time in his life Hun regretted that the time to unsheath the sword was so near at hand. On the thirteenth day they started quite early in the morning, for their last excursion was to be to the snowy crest of the "ice-king"—the very highest hill in Cadoly. Hun was so familiar with the ascent that they took no guide nor attendant. At the foot of the mountain, Hun, turning about, found a peasant following them. The man was old and infirm, and signed to Hun to stop. Hun waited, and the peasant, overtaking him, asked if he were about to ascend the "ice-king," and begged him to jodil from the torrent-bridge if he found a black goat straying in the path. They ascended, but saw no goat, and indeed,

when they looked down from the bridge into the valley beneath, they could see no peasant either. Hun looked at his stick, wishing it were of iron instead of ash. For the age was sufficiently civilised for robbers, and the banditti of these mountainous parts had not yet settled down into hotel-keepers. He said nothing to his wife of his apprehension, and soon entirely forgot it in the excitement of scrambling from rock to rock, and watching the pleasure and enjoyment she took in the ascent. They stood in silent ravines, and beside torrents, that, falling from high overhead, were lost beneath in the impenetrable darkness of the abyss, and in caverns gloomy, and upon the snowy peaks that glittered in the sun; and these effects Hun saw reproduced in his darling's face—now pensive, now animated, again subdued, and anon sparkling like the snow crystals under her feet. They spent a whole long happy day amongst these scenes, and the first star was faintly twinkling in the pale sky as they recrossed the torrent. Hun, with his arm about his wife, trolled a mountain song as

they trod quickly down the now unbroken path. Suddenly he stood still, and his song stopped simultaneously. From behind them sounded a jodil, and turning, they saw in the gathering gloom their morning's acquaintance, the peasant, standing on the bridge they had crossed. He must have been concealed for them to have passed and not seen him in their path. Hun looked before him. There was a gap scattered with the *débris* of a mountain slip. Huge boulders stood here and there. If there were danger of hidden foes, it was here. Retreat was impossible ; to advance was the only course. "When I tell you, run," he said in an undertone to Alice ; and they walked quietly forwards. They were level with the first boulder, when the man behind again jodilled, and there was a clattering of stones in the direction of the rock. "Run," said Hun, grasping his wife's arm. At the same instant a herd of ragged rascals burst from concealment, and made for the fugitives. Only one was before them, and Hun's stick cleared him from the path, and broke. They ran until Hun

heard one behind him snorting in his ear. He stopped and doubled up that pursuer, and catching Alice up in his arms, ran again. But soon he was overtaken, and the two were bound.

“These rascals will be glad to get rid of us for a ransom,” said Hun to his wife. The peasant who had descended from the bridge laughed. When their two captives were securely bound, the men formed in military order, and the peasant giving the word of command, they marched down the path. Hun was alarmed, and said to the man beside him, “Whither are you taking us?” and the man replied, “To Petros and our liege, John, King of Petria.” Then husband and wife looked at each other in dismay and despair.

Now John was cruel and revengeful, and when he heard how Alice, who had been his captive, and Hun, who had recaptured her, were taken prisoners, he vowed they should escape him no more. He said, “I will send their heads home to their father for a peace-offering;” and he laughed brutally. Prince Roland interceded for their lives, but with no

avail. John had a scaffold erected, and said the two prisoners should be bound together and lose their heads at one stroke of the headsman's sword. There were high words between the king and his son, but not until the hour of execution did Roland cease importuning his father to remit the barbarous sentences. When John went to the dungeon where the noble pair was confined, he found Hun with his arms around his wife and his lips upon her brow, and he had them bound together in that position and carried on the scaffold. The spectacle touched the heart of all except the wicked king; even Rénard the headsman was moved with some degree of compassion, and when the king told him to strike, he refused.

“Why, slave?” roared John.

“Sire, no man can sever two heads at one stroke.”

“Then sever them in two.”

“They must be sundered.”

“Why?”

“I cannot cut one head in the face of the other.”

Then John was furious, and took the sword out of Rénard's hand, and raised it to strike. But the judgment of heaven fell upon him: a sudden attack of spasms took him in the side, and the glave dropped from his hands.

The king was carried to his bed, and Hun and Alice back to their cell. But the judgment was not followed, I regret to say, by that repentance with which in more modern cases of the kind it has been attended. King John, instead of studying 'Proverbial Philosophy,' or the 'Pilgrim's Progress,' spent those moments when not engaged in sleeping, eating, pill-taking, and profane language, in devising a death yet more terrible for his captives, and a life more bitter for his enemy King Bertram. One morning, whilst he was swallowing a black draught, he was inspired with an idea. The inspiration at that moment choked him—nearly. Unfortunately his leech was at hand, and this man of physic, being active and strong in the arm, speedily restored the monarch by vigorously thumping his back. The idea was that

he could make life far more unpleasant than death to his victims. The very first day his leech allowed him to "see visitors," he had Hun brought before him.

"Hun," he said, "I have been poorly—I might say ill." Hun's face expressed regret that it had not been of a fatal character; but he held his tongue, and John, after pausing for a compliment and not getting it, proceeded, with evident gratification in his face and much amiability in his voice: "And I think of letting you live."

Hun showed so little emotion that John felt hurt.

"I am told you are passing strong and dextrous with your sword. Now I wish to turn your talents to my service. Not that I wish you to be a traitor and destroy your own countrymen. I could expect nothing so dastardly of one so noble. No, the people I wish you to destroy are mine."

Hun wondered if the old man were mad, but still kept silence.

"Rénard is infirm and unfit for his work, so

I want you to fill his place, and be my headsman."

Hun laughed derisively.

"What am I to suppose?" asked John;
"that you accept the office?"

"No, fool!" said Hun, black as thunder, and in a tone suitable to his appearance.

"You cannot spoil my temper," said John truly. "I offer you the choice of death or the office of headsman."

"I do not fear death."

"Your wife shall die also."

"She too is prepared for that."

Then John chuckled, and prepared to torture Hun. "Suppose we permit your wife to live; suppose we dishonour her and you and the king her father; suppose, dishonoured and disfigured, we turn her destitute upon the streets, to end her miserable days in a kennel, starving, and cursing her husband for his pitiful pride and cursed selfishness; suppose we keep you alive to see this, and to remember it for all time as the work of your will; suppose—" He stopped to shriek for help, for Hun, moved to

madness, was struggling like a Samson with his bonds, and cutting the flesh from his wrists with the controlling thongs.

The guards quickly conveyed Hun back to his cell, whither John's malignant spite accompanied him. He was gagged and laid upon the ground in the cell next to that in which his wife was confined, and through the long night he heard her plaintive weeping, yet by no sound or movement could let her know that in body and in spirit he was near her.

That she might not in desperation destroy herself, or be destroyed by her grief, John had attention and care paid to Hun's wife; and soon she learned that her husband, though parted from her, was not to die, and that the king's clemency was extended towards them both. Her life was far more precious to John than that of her husband; for through her he meant to strike his rival and her father, King Bertram. He gloated upon the thought of that monarch being tied by blood and marriage to his own headsman, and promised himself that, if peace ever again existed, he would in-

vite Bertram to witness an execution by his own son. To think that the proudest of kings should have for a son the most abhorred wretch in his rival's kingdom, and that his own daughter and grandchildren should get their bread and support by Hun's bloody trade!

He gave Hun time for reflection—time for the poor wretch to have his soul torn with the agonies of hell—and then sent to know his decision. And Hun, thinking to save his wife from the infamy and shame and miserable end with which she was threatened, accepted the shameful office, and gave his word of honour to live whilst God pleased, and where John chose.

II.

In the thieves' quarter of Petros, the capital of Petria, was a lane eschewed by the police. Of the bad it was the worst. Those who dwelt there deserved no protection from the state, and therein (alone) they got their deserts. It was left to them to redress their own inter-communal grievances, which they did in simple

sort. Their only state assistance was the parochial hearse, which stopped at the end of the court every morning to receive such of the inhabitants as, for obvious reasons, could live in that neighbourhood no more. To an empty hovel in this lane a *posse* of king's guards conducted Hun, carrying for his use some straw and coarse provisions. Hun was dressed in his official costume, a dress fitting tight to his body, and blood-red from head to heel, and on his shoulder he carried the long and broad glave. A crowd accompanied the procession as it threaded the streets, its numbers increasing as they entered the thieves' quarter and approached the court in which the executioner was to live. Naturally, to the inhabitants of this place he was an object of much interest and curiosity. Having brought him to his home, the guards left him to fetch Alice, and the mob gathered about the open door and little window of Hun's house, gaping at him, and marking with critical eyes the sinewy and well-developed proportions of the new headsmen. When he turned from the inspection of

the two little rooms that were in future to constitute his home, and looked at the spectators, his dark eye glittering in the deep caverns of his brows, and he took the glave from his shoulder, they retired precipitately, and a feeling of profound respect towards him was then created and permanently established. As Hun held his sword, he considered whether he should conceal it, and attempt to make his wife aware gradually of their fearful position. But his eye fell on his crimson legs, and the idea of attempting to conceal anything, whilst the meaning of such horrible grotesqueness was so evident, appeared to him so ludicrous that he burst into a long loud laugh. He stood in the doorway, leaning on his sword, and a ray of the setting sun fell glowing upon him; and those who heard his laugh, and saw him standing there all aflame, were almost converted to godliness with their dread of this incarnate fiend laughing to himself. He stood there until the guard reappeared; then he stepped back into the shadow, something to lessen the shock to his poor Alice. When the guard led

her into the room and told her it was hers, she said, "Who is that?" pointing to the dark figure in the shadow. One said, "It is the executioner—the new headsman." And Hun, approaching her, said: "Alice, it is I—Hun, your husband!"

Whether the war required so many men that the lives of none could be spared (or not spared) for civil purposes, or whether the appearance of the new headsman in the thieves' quarter exercised such salutary effect that no one deserved decapitation, is uncertain; only this is without doubt—months passed in which Hun enjoyed * his office, and yet was a headsman only in name. In time the appearance of the hovel changed greatly. For these two, when the first great shock had passed, did not sit down in idle despondency to bemoan their fate, but set about to make the best of their bad condition. As has been said, Hun was excessively ingenious, and soon furniture of a simple yet not ungraceful kind resulted from

* This was John's pleasant way of phrasing it.

his dexterity, and filled their two rooms. Whilst Hun used his knife, Alice plied her needle. For a woman named Ana gave them some cloth and sewing material. This woman was young and disreputable, and she carried her baby with her. But she loved her child, and had much good in her heart; and Alice, though her nature had lost none of its fine and delicate sensibility, thought it no shame to render such little help as was in her power to the girl when she was in her trouble, nor scorned to kiss her, and nurse her child. And now there was a link of sympathy between these two young women, for Alice was about to become a mother. And so their home became habitable and cheerful. Sometimes, before people were astir, Hun took his wife beyond the walls of the city out into the country. But neither went abroad in the full day, for folks shrunk from the headsman, and the husband and wife would be distressed, not for themselves, but for each other. In one walk she found some violets, and they took them up with the earth about them, carried

them home, set them in a broken crock, and put them in the window. And Alice, taking straws from their bed, plaited a pretty case to conceal the crock, which then looked worthy of the flowers it held. Hun was delighted and kissed his wife, praising her for her cleverness; and the poor girl was quite happy, and tears of pleasure glistened in her eyes. They were both happy the whole day, quite forgetting their condition, and as they sat side by side at evenfall, just where they might catch a glimpse of the setting sun, they were quite quiet until Alice took Hun's hand and said:

“I have been thinking, Hun.”

“What about, little one?”

“I have been thinking about my baby that will come, and that we shall want many things that we have not now. And I was thinking that if I made some covers like that about the violet crock, I might perhaps sell them, and get a little money stored by for that time.”

Hun said many kind and encouraging things, and proposed she should begin the very next day. They were both delighted: Hun because

of his wife's pleasure, and she because of doing something to please her husband. The crock-cases were made, and Alice took them to the better part of Petros, and actually sold them, bringing the money home to her husband with fear and trembling, lest some one suspecting her possession might rob her of it. And this led to other employment, for Hun carved figures in wood, and toys and brooches, and the woman who bought the crock-cases was glad to buy the novel things Hun made, and paid a very fair price for them. Alice always took the things to sell, for none would have bought them knowing that the fingers of a headsman had manipulated them. In all these journeys Alice came and went in perfect security; for the only people who would have harmed her bore too much respect for Hun to do so. So if not happiness, at least something like it came to them at this time. For they worked each for the other, and they knew that. This made their present circumstances less hard to bear. Whilst they were achieving their triumphs of devotion or struggling to

achieve them, they could not feel the degradation and misery of their existence. And they were not without hope then. John might be conquered, and obliged to surrender them to their father, King Bertram. John might die, and be succeeded by a less inhuman ruler ; or he might, with the prospect of judgment before him, repent of his barbarity. But the crowning hope that made Hun's life happy was that the love he had waited for was dawning in his wife's heart, and that their child, when it came, would bind them still closer.

In due time a boy was born to them, and Alice was now in her turn nursed by Ana, the girl she had been good to. Hun said, as he had said before : " Now my wife will love me as I love her, and we shall be quite happy." For so that they loved each other, he felt they could bear utmost hardships. And again he thanked God.

When Alice could no longer go to the toy-seller's, Hun procured a disguise, and took their manufactures himself ; and after the child was born he continued to do so. For some

time his cheerful happiness continued. At night he would hold his child in his arms, sitting on the same bench with his wife, and talk hopefully of the future, planning a life for his boy that should redeem the disgrace of his father. At such time Alice listened with bended head, glad when Hun's attention to the child or enthusiasm in the subject of his conversation diverted his attention from her; for she knew that when he spoke of that happy future, her face blanched, and her eyes betrayed her heart's knowledge that for her such happiness never was to be. But this could not go on for ever, and these signs of emotion did not entirely escape Hun's observation. He attributed them to her sense of their degradation, and yet could hardly understand why she should take his position so to heart. There was ever the fearful possibility that he would be called upon to exercise his bloody function; but yet his hands were unstained, and his immunity was a possibility. Her distress affected him to a degree he could but partially conceal; and she perceiving it became still

more distressed. She assumed a gaiety. Poor little actress! it hardly required the penetration of loving eyes to see through the deceit. It was apparent to Hun that every thought and action of his wife was directed to pleasing him, and that she was striving to be all that a good wife should be to her husband. He felt she was struggling to love him, and that these endeavours were the result of gratitude—a sense of duty, of compassion, or what not—but not of love. So gradually the hope and the happiness left him, and gloom and wretchedness came to fill the soul of poor Hun. He said to himself it was a meet punishment for taking a girl to wife who he knew loved him not, and burdened his soul with the blame of her degradation and sufferings.

He had long hours for contemplation, and amongst other conjectures he once wondered whether Alice's soul was incapable of any love, or whether she cherished the remembrance of some lover to whom her heart was ever faithful. To this question he soon was to find an answer.

Returning one day from the toy-dealer's, he entered the outer room, and was crossing to put his cloak in its customary place, when he heard voices in the inner room. He stopped, holding his breath as he listened. A man's voice was pleading to be heard; his wife's was imploring him to leave her. The strange voice said: "Alice, I must speak to you; if not now, when?"

"Any time but now. Think how my poor Hun suffers, and spare him this. For God's sake, go!"

Then Hun heard a kiss and a step behind him, and turning his head, he saw pass from the door a man's figure. Hun buried his face in his hands and bethought him what he had best do, and was speedily resolved. So that Alice, presently summoning fortitude to peep into the next room, saw him sitting, as was his wont, in the doorway, quietly carving his little wooden figures, and with no agitation in his face. When she entered the room and he heard her footstep, he looked up kindly, and bade her come and sit by his side in the light.

He usually was silent over his work, but to-day he exerted himself to cheer his wife ; and in the evening they walked out together to get the fresh air, and saw the young men with their sweethearts floating happily in the little shallops upon the broad river. When he lay down he kissed his wife tenderly, and took his sleeping baby boy in his arms. The little fellow turned in his sleep and laid his tiny hand on Hun's bearded face ; and Hun said to himself, " I have my boy to love and live for." He held him gently through the night, and it comforted his stricken heart. He did not sleep, but thought calmly and kindly of his wife, and that which had happened to them. He felt no jealousy nor anger with her because she loved another. Alice was yet but nineteen, and it was only natural she should love and be loved. Probably his surmise had been correct ; and this lover was some noble of Cadoly who, like himself, had been rejected by her father in former times, but had, unlike himself, been loved by Alice ; who had traced her to her miserable home, forgetful of every-

thing but his own love. Hun remembered his wife's agitation on the memorable day of the marriage, but how could he blame her for marrying him? Might she not too have thought that she could learn to love her husband? and had she not striven to amend her error, doing all that lay in her power to make her love obedient to her will? Poor, poor little soul, scarcely yet a woman, crushing the sweetest and dearest feeling of youth from her heart, attempting to make affection flower where there was no light. And Hun yearned with an unchanged devotion towards his wife, and an ineffable compassion.

The following morning the work—a very long one—of washing and dressing baby was begun, and Hun was preparing for his morning's work, when he remembered having left his knife to be ground at the cutler's. He could do no work without his knife. The cutler lived but a few doors from the end of the lane. The knife was obtained, and he was proceeding homewards when he saw at some distance before him the figure that had passed

from his house the day before. He felt sick at heart, and paused as he saw the man cross the threshold of his door; then Hun followed, thinking a climax was at hand. When he entered his miserable home, he rested by the lintel to gather strength, and then he stepped towards the inner room. But as he heard his wife's voice his resolution failed him, and turning from the door he leaned against the wall, knowing not what course to take. He heard Alice's voice, and she said, "No, I cannot leave him. You wrong me to ask it. I have sinned, but I will sin no more."

"Dear one, *I* am your husband. You are bound to me by ties more binding than those of priests and form. Is it sin to return to him from whom you were torn? If Hun is indeed brave and good and knew all, he would not keep you from me. What sin have you committed that has not been expiated by your sufferings?"

"I married Hun; and what can I suffer that shall ever sufficiently punish me for breaking that noble heart—the noblest,

gentlest, kindest that is? I have dragged him down to misery and disgrace to save myself from the infamy of loving my father's foe—”

“Alice, Alice, tell him—let me tell him—that I, Roland, am your husband; that your heart and soul were mine before he took you from me to himself, and that still you are mine—”

“No, no, no! listen, Roland. This must end now and for ever; we must see, must think of each other never again. All that you say, I have thought; all that you can think, I have pondered in the long bitter hours of my shame and remorse. I will tell him all—everything; but, more than this, I will beg him not to turn me from him; I will pray him to keep me while we yet live, to be patient still with me, and to wait until happier days come to us. Then, if he will, I will live with him and be indeed his wife, and God will fill my heart with a holy love, and bless us with children that shall bring me no shame, nor be unworthy of his kisses. Ro-

land, you have known me weak and yielding ; know me now firm and resolved. No power on earth, save my husband's will, shall alter the course I have elected to take. And now, for the love you bear me, leave me. Be generous, and spare me ; you also have been guilty, and owe me reparation ; leave me then, and so lighten my sufferings. No, no ; do not touch me. Go, and may God bless you !”

Then Roland, after a few broken words of farewell, said, “At least let me give my boy one farewell kiss ;” and Hun, trembling in the room beyond, heard this man kissing his child—the child Hun had cherished as his own ; and the next moment Roland passed him and was gone.

Hun did not move until he heard the child whimpering, and marked that no soothing voice responded. Then he went to the door, and beheld Alice, with her boy upon her lap, lying back in her seat, all supine and lifeless. And he lifted Roland's boy, and held it in his arms, whilst he did what was in his power to

restore his wife. And still there was in his heart no feeling but of compassion and pity for the poor broken girl ; for which let them think him a fool who will. When life returned to Alice, she said,

“ Hun, I have much to tell you when we are both able to bear yet another trial.”

Hun pressed her hand silently ; and she, sitting up upon the bed, leaned against his breast, and said softly : “ You have petted me and given me my way in everything always. Will you humour me yet a little more ? ”

“ Everything you wish I will grant you, my poor little wife,” said Hun.

“ Our wedding day is on Sunday. Let me keep my secret till then, and think me still thy faithful wife.”

Hun kissed her, and talked of other matters ; and when she was strong again left her, and took his work into the doorway. There he pondered and pondered, and said to himself : “ I must abide by my lot, and do always as God directs me.” When his wife drew a

stool beside him he laid his knife down, and passed his arm around her waist. And she, holding his hand, said, "Hun, you must give me your promise never to leave me alone again. I will ask Ana to sell our toys." And Hun promised as Alice asked.

The very next day the whole world was out of doors, and Petros was in an uproar. Bells rang, and the streets were filled with soldiers marching to martial music. For King Bertram had been slain, and Cadoly had sued to Petria for peace. Now King John for many months had been bedridden, and unable to conduct the affairs of war. His son Roland was well able to do this, and all else that becomes a prince; and the people, who loved him, would have been well pleased that he should. For Roland had many noble and good qualities, which, with his handsome appearance and frank generous manners, endeared him to the people. But John was jealous of this favour, and feared that Roland would take advantage of his position to dethrone him, and make himself king; so he placed the

command of the army in the hands of a favorite named Bëog. The war being at an end, Bëog returned to Petros, and filled the city with his troops. Then he presented himself before the bedridden king, entering his room with a dozen of his armed favourites at his heels. John, seeing his visitors were in no mood to be rebuked, refrained from throwing his basin of gruel at Bëog's head, which was his first impulse upon being thus rudely wakened from his sleep, and begged civilly enough to know what procured him the honour of this visit.

“We have come,” said Bëog, “to make a proposal. These influential gentlemen”—he pointed over his shoulder to the unshaven ruffians behind him—“are a deputation which has waited upon me, and begged me to represent them in Parliament.”

“That can be easily done,” responded John, very much relieved at the moderation of the request. “You may turn out one of the present members—”

“We have turned them out,” interrupted Bëog.

“Thank you,” said the king meekly.

“In future the government will be imperial and despotic.”

“Oh, indeed !” murmured John.

“And the nation, through their deputation, desires me to be their despot.”

Then John could restrain his wrath no longer, and lifting his bowl, flung it at Bëog’s head ; but, in return, Bëog gave him his gruel in quite a different form, and definitively put an end to the king’s ailments and the king himself. They left the king dead, and searching the palace, discovered Roland, whom they seized and cast into prison. Then Bëog sent forth the heralds with proclamations and handbills, and posted broadsides, announcing that John was dead, and Bëog King of Petria. Now the nation was less pleased than Bëog with this arrangement, for knowing and loving Prince Roland, they had looked forward to his becoming their king. The whole army knew of Bëog’s cruelties and tyranny, and comparing notes with the inhabitants of Petros, found how much they should lose by his usurpa-

tion. There was not one cheer when Bëog, surrounded by his friends, rode bowing through the streets.

In childish playfulness a youth tossed a lifeless cat at the new monarch, and Bëog, who, even when clemency was so necessary, could not control his evil passions, had the child run in there and then. This still more incensed the public, and when Bëog gained the shelter of the imperial roof, the royal housemaid counted the marks of no less than nineteen smashed and unsavoury eggs on the imperial coat, while his highness's leech consumed twopennyworth of diachylon plaster in covering the wound inflicted on Bëog's occiput by a brickbat.

"This looks like disaffection," said Bëog, and vowed that his first act should be to put up the income-tax to fifteenpence. At that moment a policeman brought intelligence that they were burning him in effigy, and crying in the streets, "Long live King Roland!"

"Long live Roland"—shall he!" said

Bëog ; and finding that the policeman could write, he dictated an order for the execution of Roland the next morning at eight o'clock, and put his mark to the document, and the necessary commands were sent to the sheriffs and to the executioner. An hour later an embassy came from Cadoly, and told Bëog how the people of that nation begged the restoration of the Princess Alice, whom they had chosen to be their queen and fill the throne of her father. Bëog said the princess should be found and delivered ; but first he resolved her husband should be assassinated, and that he would marry her, and so get the two kingdoms under his rule.

During the commotion in the city, Hun and Alice were left sole occupants of their neighbourhood, the dwellers therein being busily engaged elsewhere. Only the executioner and his wife were uninterested in what was passing in the outer world, little deeming that those events were vitally to affect them. But as they were sitting at their frugal supper a soldier opened the door, and handed a paper

to Hun. Hun read it, and so did Alice; for she watched the face of her husband, and saw there that at last the time was come for him to exercise the functions of a headsman. When he had read the paper, Hun said calmly to the soldier: "Am I to accompany you?" The man laughed, and said, "Yes, or there will be no headsman to do the business. A troop of soldiers will be here presently to protect you."

The man withdrew, and Hun, turning to his wife, said, "Awake the little one, and dress it and yourself. You must both come with me." Then he donned his red habit, and he and his wife and their child sat together in the flickering light of their lamp, waiting for the soldiers. They could not talk; but Alice held her husband's hand, looking into his pale careworn face. Neither spoke.

When the soldiers arrived they arose, and Hun, going to the corner of the room, took his heavy glove, and put it over his shoulder.

Then he took his wife's hand, and in the midst of the troops they marched to the tower that stood by the river. But fierce threats and imprecations accompanied them, and almost they had to fight their way through the excited mobs that filled the streets. Everywhere sounded the cry, "Long live Roland!" Hun felt his wife's hand twitch when she first heard this cry; and he told her what he had learnt from the soldier beside him, that Bëog was king, and the people desired Roland in his room. They arrived at the tower, and were admitted; the soldiers keeping the mob from following, by a free use of their pikes. The constable of the tower had a comely kind-hearted wife, who knew, as most people did, the outline of Alice's history, and seeing her so pale and thin she bade her bring her baby and sit with her in her own room. There Hun left them, glad that she should hear of Roland's fate from other lips than his, and so be prepared for that which was to follow. After a while he returned, and looking in his wife's face, saw that she knew

of her lover's doom, and as he took her hand and said, "Come with me," there was eager hope in her eyes, as if she divined Hun's purpose; and he saw this, and knew that her love for Roland was not dead. The constable's lady had disposed the child in a rug upon a couch; but Hun took it up in his arms. And Alice was conscious that he knew everything, and was about to take the boy to his father and her to her lover. There was a warder waiting at the door, and he led them all three through long dark passages, and down flights of cold damp stone steps, until they came to a door, where stood two other warders. They opened the door, and all entered a passage, the door being closed behind them. Then Hun stopped, while the men went on and unbolted and unbarred the door at the end. And when one called to them, "This way," Hun put the baby into Alice's arms. He kept his hand upon the child whilst he kissed it, and then he took his wife's head between his hands and pressed a long fervent kiss upon her forehead, and she turned her lips upward and kissed his

cheek, that was all dabbled and wet with tears. But she knew not that never more she was to kiss that furrowed cheek, nor feel his loving touch again. As she receded from him, he spread his hands towards her, and his lips moved to say farewell; but the sound died within him, she looked not back, the harsh door closed on all he loved, and, desolate and broken utterly, he turned away. He told the warder he could find his way alone, and slowly traversed the dark cold passages. Once he stopped and turned round, straining his eyes and ears for some last sound or sight of her. All was dark and silent. He yearned to return and see her yet once more, knowing the folly of his desire. All, all he had ever loved was dead to him; he was wifeless and childless, friendless and hopeless. Not one thing was left him to love or to hope for. What misery of the past equalled this lonely desolation? To him now, how happy seemed the past; how gladly would he have lived it over again! He would have returned to the home where they had lived, if he had been suffered to do

so ; it was a blessed spot to him, and he longed to see it once more.

A guard, showing a handful of money to another, said, " See what the headsman gave me for fetching an old straw crock cover from his home ! "

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Around the scaffold was a dense inert mass of soldiery, and beyond a surging roaring mob. The soldiers, but for their fear of Bëog, would have been active against him. But fearing him, they stood there a living wall between the infuriated crowd and the hated king. For Bëog was there to awe his soldiers and show the people that he feared them not. To protect himself from the missiles the crowd hailed at him, he commanded Roland to be brought up, although it wanted yet an hour of the time fixed for the execution. Hun strode on to the scaffold with his sword in his hands. The execrations of the mob did not cause a muscle of his face to move ; he stood there quietly waiting, his tall red figure re-

vealed against the grey background of stonework. Then Roland appeared, and the crowd was hushed; but a murmur of wonder arose when he stepped up to the executioner and took his hand. The two men looked long and steadfastly into each other's eyes, and then Roland said, "I am ready, Hun."

"I am ready also," said Hun. Bëog, who was at a loss to understand what he saw, thrust Roland to the place where he should stand, and stepping back a yard, cried to Hun: "Strike!" Hun threw the glave over his shoulder to strike, and set his foot forward. His muscles swelled and his fingers tightened their grasp, and suddenly he moved his foot, and bringing his body round, faced Bëog. Like the bolt from a bow, swiftly flew the long blade from his shoulder, flashed in the air, and severed Bëog's head from his shoulders.

The gaping head Hun held high and cried in a ringing voice,

"Long live King Roland!"

But before the cry was echoed, he dropped

the head, snatched the sword from a soldier beside him, and putting it to his breast, threw himself upon it.

And so died Hun who slew the king, and this is how the kingdoms of Cadoly and Petria came to be afterwards one empire.

END OF VOL. I.



